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Friday, December 15, 2023

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Friday, December 15, 2023

The Senate met at 9 a.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

LACTANET CANADA AND SEMEX

CONGRATULATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL DAIRY FEDERATION AWARD

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, over the past few weeks, we've heard a lot about farmers and climate change and mitigation, maybe far too much, but I rise today to highlight two outstanding organizations in the Canadian dairy industry, Lactanet Canada and Semex, and their outstanding recent mitigation efforts and success.

In October, at the International Dairy Federation World Dairy Summit in Chicago, Illinois, these organizations were honoured with the prestigious Innovation in Climate Action award, recognizing their groundbreaking work in advancing sustainability and environmental stewardship within the dairy sector.

Partnerships are the backbone of progress, and Lactanet Canada and Semex exemplify the power of collaboration. Their long-standing synergy has not only supported dairy farmers in Canada but also contributed to the entire dairy industry's sustainability goals. Nominated by Dairy Farmers of Canada, these organizations were commended for their role in developing the world's first of its kind methane efficiency genetic evaluation tool. This is a revolutionary step toward reducing methane emissions without compromising production levels in dairy cattle.

This groundbreaking initiative was launched in April of 2023 after a decade of research and development led by my alma mater, the University of Guelph. It enables dairy producers to select animals that contribute to lower methane emissions by using innovative technologies to evaluate and predict methane production.

As the dairy sector and, in fact, all of agriculture strives toward achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, Lactanet Canada's and Semex's methane efficiency genetic evaluation stands as a testament to the crucial role research and innovation play in this shared journey. It represents a commitment to sustainability and innovative dairy management practices that are essential for the industry's growth.

I applaud Lactanet Canada and Semex for their well-deserved recognition and acknowledge their commitment to a sustainable future, their dedication to innovation and their invaluable contribution to the global dairy industry.

By bringing the world's first methane efficiency index to the dairy industry, these organizations are empowering producers worldwide to take immediate, simple, low-cost and permanent action in reducing their own breeding programs' methane emissions.

Congratulations to both organizations, and may their achievements inspire further advancements in agriculture and environmental conservation.

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

WORLD JUNIOR-B CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, with the winter break just around the corner, I thought there was no better time than the present to talk about the joy of Canadian winter sports. Being a northern country, Canadians tend to make the best of our cold winters by skiing, skating, playing hockey, tobogganing, snowshoeing and, yes, curling.

Colleagues, you guessed it. It is time for chapter 8 of Team Plett's curling journey.

Team Plett, which is also Team Canada, had the privilege of representing their — our — country at the World Junior-B Curling Championships in Lohja, Finland. It was quite a week, colleagues. The girls got to experience the beautiful country of Finland as they had the privilege of competing alongside talented curlers from 25 countries at the World Championships.

Team Canada played their first game on December 7, where they competed against Romania, besting them 15 to 1. In game 2, they played Spain and won 7 to 3. Italy was next, where again Team Canada won 7 to 3. They then needed an extra end to defeat a very determined team from the Netherlands. Game 5 was against Belgium, where our girls played a strong game, winning 12 to 3 and assuring themselves of a playoff spot. Then in the final game of the round robin, the girls played against Czechia, where they won 6 to 3, ending their round robin with a perfect 6–0 record.

Probably their most exciting game came in the quarter-finals against Denmark. Denmark got two in the eighth end, forcing an extra end. Here, as their last shot, Myla was facing two Denmark rocks frozen against each other on the button. Anyone who knows curling knows that getting a double on frozen rocks is one of the toughest shots. She needed to make an extremely difficult

double by first coming around a very tight guard, but true to form, she made the shot, making the double, counting two and assuring themselves a spot at the World A Championships in February.

The girls then moved on to play Turkey, who had won their pool, also with a perfect win-loss record. I would say this might have been our team's strongest game of the tournament, beating a very talented Turkish foursome by a score of 9 to 4.

Finally, they were now in the gold-medal game against China, who also had a perfect record. Here the Chinese played a flawless game, beating our girls by a score of 6 to 3, giving Canada the silver medal and a record of 8–1; no small feat.

While Canadians from across the country proudly cheered them on, including many in this chamber, Team Canada girls wore the Maple Leaf with honour and distinction. They have now returned home with a silver medal around their necks.

Senators, I have no doubt that you will happily join me in congratulating Team Canada consisting of Myla Plett, Alyssa Nedohin, Chloe Fediuk, Allie Iskiw, coaches Blair Lenton and David Nedohin on their latest quest at the world championships and help cheer them on as they represent our country in Finland in February at the World Junior-A Curling Championships.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Yong Tek Kim. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator MacDonald.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

CANADIAN DENTAL CARE PLAN

Hon. Andrew Cardozo: Honourable senators, I want to speak about dental care and Pharmacare. Colleagues, in 1961, the Diefenbaker government established the Royal Commission on Health Services, chaired by Mr. Justice Emmett Hall. The Hall commission reported in 1964, and in 1968, the Pearson government passed the first Medical Care Act. This week, some 62 years later, Canada has moved to add dental care to that original health care.

Let me quote briefly from the announcement:

Oral health is an important part of our overall health and well-being. Regular visits to an oral health professional have proven to reduce the risk of tooth decay, gum disease and

other serious health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and stroke. . . . Access to oral health care should not be dependent on Canadians' ability to pay.

Once fully implemented, the CDCP —

— Remember that acronym; it's going to be one of our iconic acronyms in time —

— will help ease financial barriers to accessing oral health care for up to nine million uninsured Canadian residents with an annual family income of less than \$90,000.

• (0910)

To meet anticipated demand, the availability will be staggered over several years by age group.

The other part I'm waiting for is pharmacare, which I have been raising in the Senate. While the Liberal government, with the support of the NDP, had committed to pass the pharmacare bill by the end of December — in other words, by today, Senator Gold — I am disappointed they have not met their deadline. I am, however, encouraged that they are continuing negotiations for such a plan, and I understand that such negotiations are based on having an efficient and affordable system.

As we close out 2024, I compliment both parties for doing dental care and encourage them to meet their new deadline by the end of March 2024. I hope we can see it pass shortly thereafter.

I, therefore, wish the negotiators Godspeed in adding this important step to a great Canadian iconic policy that goes back to the Diefenbaker-Pearson years. May I take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, colleagues, to wish you all the best for the season, for Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and may the new year be a more peaceful and harmonious one. Thank you.

[Translation]

ACADIAN REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, unfortunately, Canada is built on far too many tragic incidents and hardship, and the victims still carry the pain and scars of those indignities to this day.

On December 13, Acadian Remembrance Day, we commemorate the countless victims of the Great Upheaval, particularly those who perished on the *Violet*, *Ruby* and *Duke William* in December 1758.

The Great Upheaval took place in the 18th century and is a tragic episode in our collective history. More than 10,000 Acadians were deported between 1755 and 1763.

These sombre events still live in our collective memory, but they also give us the opportunity to move forward with determination into the future. Acadia is alive and well today thanks to its culture, French language, institutions and engaged citizens.

And yet, this francophone people that landed on the shores of the Atlantic more than four centuries ago has no clear anchor in our constitutional and legislative texts. Acadians are part of our official language minority communities, of course, but they are first and foremost a people with a unique culture, language and vitality.

At a time when the French language is so fragile in our country, let's ensure, honourable senators, that these French Canadian people have access to an education system in their language, from early childhood to post-secondary, and that they are fully recognized in our democratic institutions.

[English]

In closing, senators, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you a happy and restful holiday season. And if I may, colleagues, with the respect I have for all senators, allow me to share this thought.

I hope that in 2024 we spend less time trying to define who is an independent in this chamber and who is not, because I doubt Canadians are really interested in this type of debate. It is not for me, or anyone else here, to define our colleagues' identity.

Recently, we heard lots of talk about the so-called independent senators. In my humble opinion, it's a political game with little fertility and little respect for the parliamentarians who dedicate themselves to this august chamber. With all due respect, senators, let us move away from a certain type of discourse and let us focus on what really concerns Canadians.

[Translation]

In 2024, I also encourage us to continue our legislative work with strength and determination to improve the lives of the most disadvantaged in our country. I ask that we become increasingly united in an effort to provide our children and future generations with a healthy, safe future on a healthy and still habitable planet.

This independent Acadian senator sincerely thanks you all. I wish you a joyful holiday season, and I wish a happy birthday to Senator Petitclerc.

[English]

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

INCIDENT AFTER COMMITTEE MEETING

Hon. Brent Cotter: Honourable senators, I rise in my capacity as Chair of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Senate to inform the Senate of an incident that occurred on Thursday, December 7, following the conclusion of a meeting of the committee.

The committee had been meeting that morning to conduct clause-by-clause consideration of Bill S-231, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Criminal Records Act, the National Defence Act and the DNA Identification Act.

[Senator Cormier]

At the meeting, a number of amendments to the bill were adopted. The incident to which I refer occurred shortly after the adjournment of the meeting when some of us, including myself, had left the committee room. One individual, a witness at an earlier stage of the committee's deliberations on the bill, and who had attended clause-by-clause deliberations, returned to the committee room, approached a member of the committee in the presence of senators' staff, and in an aggressive tone said to the senator, "Congratulations, senator, on making the world safer for murderers and rapists."

A staff member immediately reported the incident to the Parliamentary Protective Service, and officers at the main entrance escorted the individual from the building. As he exited, he turned toward the senator's staff member and, in a loud voice, swore at them using a common two-word vulgarity that I will not repeat in this chamber.

I have subsequently learned that the person in question also made a highly inappropriate communication to another senator while deliberations of the committee were in progress. The incident was reported to Senate Administration and to me as chair of the committee. I am troubled by this incident, as are all members of the committee, and staff of the Senate precinct.

As noted on page 107 of the *Third Edition of the House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

In order to fulfill their parliamentary duties, Members should be able to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. Assaulting, threatening, or insulting a member during a proceeding of Parliament, or while a Member is circulating within the Parliamentary Precinct, is a violation of the rights of Parliament.

Honourable senators, the members of the committee have been made aware of the situation. They believe it is a serious matter for the committee and one which the committee will take under consideration. I will endeavour to report back to the Senate in due course. Thank you.

[Translation]

ROYAL ASSENT

NOTICE

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

RIDEAU HALL

December 14, 2023

Madam Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Richard Wagner, Deputy of Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada, will proceed to the Senate Chamber on the 15th day of December, 2023, at 3:30 p.m., to grant Royal Assent to certain bills of law.

Yours sincerely,

Maia Welbourne

Assistant Secretary to the Governor General

The Honourable
The Speaker of the Senate
Ottawa

[English]

QUESTION PERIOD

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, the Trudeau government never proactively revealed that the consulting firm Accenture was running the Canada Emergency Business Account, or CEBA, loans program for small businesses receiving \$208 million in contracts. In June, the Trudeau government claimed that Accenture had 125 employees in Canada and 4 in the United States who were working on the program. However, a recent answer to one of my Order Paper questions has led to the discovery that the work plan on the loan accounting system for this program is, in fact, being done in Brazil.

Leader, how many Accenture employees in Brazil are working on this program? Why has your government failed to provide this information? If you don't have the answer today, Senator Gold, do you commit to finding out and letting us know at your earliest opportunity?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. No, I don't know the answer to that. I do know that the programs to which you refer are ones that were designed to benefit Canadians, and I believe they did benefit Canadians. I certainly will make inquiries.

Senator Plett: Thank you for that. The answer to my written question calls the loans accounting system one of the most critical parts of the CEBA program. The contracts for this system are worth \$23 million. They were never disclosed, and we still don't know how much of this work is being done in Brazil by an Accenture subsidiary.

Will the government come clean about all aspects of this contract — for once — with Canadians?

Senator Gold: As I said, I will certainly make inquiries to determine what details are appropriate to share.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

CARBON TAX

Hon. Leo Housakos: Senator Gold, yesterday, while listening to you answer the questions in regard to the Trudeau carbon tax, it became evidently clear that you think we just don't understand — that we're not as smart as the Trudeau government to understand how the carbon tax works — and that we're exaggerating the impact on the cost of living.

• (0920)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTERNAL ECONOMY, BUDGETS AND ADMINISTRATION

TENTH REPORT OF COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. Lucie Moncion, Chair of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, presented the following report:

Friday, December 15, 2023

The Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration has the honour to present its

TENTH REPORT

Your committee, which is authorized by the Rules of the Senate to consider financial and administrative matters and, pursuant to the *Senate Administration Rules*, to prepare estimates of the sum that will be required from Parliament for the services of the Senate, has approved the Senate Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25 and recommends their adoption.

A summary of these Estimates is appended to this report. Your committee notes that the proposed total is \$134,868,514.

Respectfully submitted,

LUCIE MONCION

Chair

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 2394.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this report be taken into consideration?

(On motion of Senator Moncion, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

Actually, listening to you during the exchange you had with Senator Coyle, it's as simple as saying the following: Pierre Poilievre has removed his glasses, while he's smiling and repeating a thousand times, "Axe the tax," and he's hypnotized Canadians from coast to coast.

Well, this is my question to you, Senator Gold: Premiers are calling to axe the tax. First Nations organizations are calling to axe the tax. Small businesses are calling to axe the tax. The farming and agricultural sector is calling to axe the tax. If we believe some of the polling, millions of Canadians are asking to axe the tax. Are all of these people stupid and just not as smart as the Trudeau cabinet when it comes to dealing with the carbon tax, or understanding it?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Never — in any answer that I have given to you — have I accused Canadians of not being smart, nor have I ever asserted that this government is smarter than anybody else. I will simply assert this, because it happens to be factual: I give your leader and your party credit for being intelligent. That's why I have called the consistent invocation of the tax on pollution as a cause of all the ills — including food prices — to be misinformation.

Your leader knows better. You know better. You have read the independent reports. You have access to the economists who have, at length, described not only the virtues of the tax, but also its marginal impact on food. I'm giving you credit for being intelligent, and I'm calling you out for misinformation.

Senator Housakos: Then, I'll call you out for misinformation because, at the end of the day, the carbon tax is just one of the many things your government does that has led to a higher cost of living. Since you've acknowledged that our party and our leader are intelligent, in the spirit of Christmas — and in order to give some relief to middle-class and poor Canadians who are being pummelled by your policy — will you agree to do two things? Pause the carbon tax for 12 months so that we can actually see what the real impact is. And, second, will you invite Senator Marshall and Pierre Poilievre to the next cabinet meeting before a budget is tabled so that they can give you some lessons on what a fiscal —

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Housakos: — because that's the second element of your policy that's missing the cost —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Housakos, thank you. Senator Gold, your response?

Senator Gold: Well, in the spirit of Christmas and transparency, I think, no, it's not up to me to invite those people to a cabinet meeting. But I should say this: There is a difference, senator, between being intelligent and being wise, and there's a difference between being intelligent and wise and responsible. The government that I represent has a credible climate change

policy. It's on the table in detail. You may not agree with it, but I'm sure that Canadians are looking forward to hearing the policy from the Conservative Party —

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

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

FUNDING FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POST-DOCTORAL SCHOLARS

Hon. Stan Kutcher: Senator Gold, once again, I rise to bring attention to the unnecessary challenges facing our best and brightest scientists.

Canada struggles to retain top research talent, as our post-doctoral fellowships are not competitive internationally. Every year, we lose about 30% of our PhD graduates to international brain drain. A post-doctoral fellowship in Canada from one of Canada's tri-councils is actually \$45,000 a year. Now, senators, that's for a PhD student who is doing groundbreaking scientific work. We're paying them \$45,000 a year.

In the United States or Europe, they can earn two or three times that. When will the government commit to combatting the brain drain of our top talent by investing in our next generation of researchers?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator, for your continued advocacy on this. As a former academic, and as a recipient of support for my research in an earlier life, I totally understand and applaud your efforts to advocate for more funding.

As I said — and I will repeat — the government has announced more than \$1 billion in support for scientists, researchers and students through a variety of funding programs. The government is committed to continuing to explore ways in which they can better support this, as well as our future generations of researchers and the talent that they bring to our country.

Senator Kutcher: Thank you for that, Senator Gold. I just want to raise the reality of another economic problem. This brain drain of our young PhD students costs our economy at least \$740 million a year in training investments made for them. By simply making post-doctoral salaries internationally competitive, we can help prevent these young scientists from leaving. When will the government implement this simple solution?

• (0930)

Senator Gold: The government has announced funding to support over five and a half thousand promising students and researchers and is working within the envelopes it has available to it. Thankfully, universities are also doing their part with private philanthropy, which I have been involved in personally, to support doctoral students at the University of Montreal. More needs to be done. The government is doing what it can under the circumstances.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

ROLE OF INDEPENDENT SENATORS

Hon. Tony Dean: Senator Gold, there has been heightened discussion over the last couple of weeks about this more independent Senate that we all work in, most recently from our colleague Senator Cormier this morning.

You were appointed as an independent senator. You are now the Government Representative in the Senate and our main interlocutor with the government. As we close out this year, could you share your perspectives on this evolving project and just give us your year-end reflections? It may not be the best time to ask you this, but it is an important question any time, so please share your thoughts.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): I am pleased with and proud of the work that the Senate has done over this session. It hasn't been an easy one. I'm not always pleased with the votes or the results, but I signed up for this gig, as I've said on other occasions, because I truly believe that the Senate adds value, but only if it is free from the kind of control from the centre that has characterized it in the past.

It's a work in progress. I'm pleased with the growing understanding amongst senators of what our constitutional role is and isn't. There is still work to be done there. It certainly took me a while, and I still remember very much those early days, months and years. But I'm pleased with the direction it's going, and I hope we can continue to add value for Canadians, as I believe we are doing. Thank you.

Senator Dean: Let me close this Q&A by thanking you on behalf of all of us in this place for the work that you do every day and the time and effort that you put into it. I know it takes a toll, but I want you to know that it is deeply appreciated, and we're all grateful for it. Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

WEHWEHNEH BAHGAHKINAHGOHN PROJECT

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

In Manitoba, the Southern Chiefs' Organization is leading Indigenous economic reconciliation and revitalization in downtown Winnipeg through the Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgohn project. This includes the transformation of the iconic Hudson's Bay building in Winnipeg through partnership with their federal, provincial and municipal treaty partners. In April 2022, the federal government committed \$65 million to the project through the National Housing Strategy and the National Housing Co-Investment Fund.

Up to this day, the Southern Chiefs' Organization has itself financed millions of dollars in pre-construction work while the federal government commitment is still pending and the rest of the development hangs in the balance. Senator Gold, when will the Southern Chiefs' Organization receive the committed federal funds in advance of the next stage of this important historical project?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question and for bringing this matter to my attention. I confess, I was not aware of this, so I'm grateful for your question. I will certainly make inquiries as quickly as I can in the hope that what sounds like an important project can be realized.

Senator Osler: Thank you, Senator Gold. The reclamation of the Hudson's Bay building has been called one of the most significant developments for downtown Winnipeg in decades. The Southern Chiefs' Organization's visionary plan will turn it into a space for economic and social reconciliation. The plan includes affordable housing, culturally safe living units for First Nations elders; high-quality, licensed child care and a health and healing centre.

Senator Gold, can the Southern Chiefs' Organization count on the federal government as a long-term treaty partner to ensure the success of the project?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. I certainly can't answer in terms of long-range partnerships without making the inquiries, but I do undertake to make them.

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

NON-INSURED HEALTH BENEFITS

Hon. Brian Francis: Senator Gold, according to Sheri McKinstry, co-founder of the Indigenous Dental Association of Canada, Métis and non-status First Nations people will benefit the most from the Canadian Dental Care Plan, or CDCP. However, for status First Nations people and Inuit eligible for the Non-Insured Health Benefits, or NIHB, program, it may only cover out-of-pocket costs, and those in remote communities may not see much benefit at all.

Given this criticism and current gaps in access, what is your government doing to ensure those eligible under the NIHB, including in remote and northern communities, receive equal or better access to dental care?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question. There are a number of different aspects to it. With or without the dental care plan, you still need to live in a community where there is access to the actual services, and that is a problem, as we know, in remote and Indigenous areas, and that needs to be worked on in partnership with Indigenous communities.

With regard to the federal programs, dental care is health care and everyone deserves it. The Non-Insured Health Benefits program supports First Nations and Inuit communities, which includes coverage for preventive service treatment centres and orthodontics, and it also includes transportation costs if services aren't available locally.

I understand that members of First Nations and Inuit who are eligible under the Non-Insured Health Benefits program can apply to the CDCP if they meet the eligibility criteria. In that case, benefits will be coordinated. This would also cover travel costs, as I think I just mentioned. It's an incomplete and inadequate answer and more work needs to be done.

Senator Francis: Thank you, Senator Gold. According to a 2017 report by the Auditor General, First Nations and Inuit have nearly twice as much dental disease and more unmet oral health needs than non-Indigenous populations.

With this background in mind, what is your government doing to ensure that the full rollout of the CDCP does not exacerbate existing disparities in oral health between non-Indigenous people and status First Nations and Inuit?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. The short answer is that in order for the gap to be closed, there needs to be more services available in more communities and closer to more communities, and that will require funding and partnerships with dental schools and communities so that over time — and it will take time — that gap can be closed, as it should be.

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

Hon. Claude Carignan: My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

Leader, in 2016, your government launched an \$83-billion National Housing Strategy. The strategy's objectives were as follows:

Homelessness is reduced year-over-year. Housing is affordable and in good condition. Affordable housing promotes social and economic inclusion for individuals and families. Housing outcomes in Canada's territories are improved year-over-year.

These are only a few of the expected outcomes.

With 24 months remaining before the strategy ends, can it be described as anything but a complete, total and abysmal failure? Will the government admit that this strategy involving the expenditure of \$83 billion has been a total failure?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): The answer is no. It is absolutely true that there's a housing crisis. It is absolutely true that Canadians — of all ages, but especially younger generations — are having trouble finding housing, and many have given up hope of ever finding housing.

[Senator Gold]

With respect, however, your question completely disregards everything that has happened from 2016 to today, including the pandemic and wars, which have seriously disrupted supply chains.

• (0940)

In short, the government is working on this, whether in the budget, the Fall Economic Statement and the bill we just passed to help Canadians, and we will continue to do so.

Senator Carignan: Clearly, your government's \$83 billion in investments have not helped.

How many more housing units will be built with the resurrected Sears catalogue of prefabricated plans? Will that solve what the \$83 billion couldn't?

Senator Gold: As I said yesterday — and I misquoted the author, but I support what he said in *La Presse* — the idea of producing pre-set plans is just one element among many others that will speed up housing construction.

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): My question for the government leader also has to do with the Canada Emergency Business Account, or CEBA, loans program for small businesses. In an article this morning in *The Globe and Mail*, Accenture told the reporter to ask the government for more information about the contracts. However, in the same article, Minister Chrystia Freeland's office washed its hands of this matter, saying it wasn't involved and refusing to provide further information.

Leader, this is one of the largest contracts the Government of Canada has ever signed with external consultants, worth at least \$208 million in taxpayers' money. Where is the accountability for the CEBA loans program?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): As I have said on many occasions, the CEBA loans program was an important element to help Canadians get through the crisis, which we did. In that regard, the follow-up and review are being done appropriately and seriously to make sure that we have a full understanding and analysis of all that happened with respect to the program — which we knew was rushed, by design, to benefit Canadians. That is what is in play.

Senator Martin: In terms of accountability, it seems there is none under the Trudeau government. Leader, when did Minister Chrystia Freeland and Minister Mary Ng become aware that CEBA work was being done in Brazil? Did they just find out through *The Globe and Mail*, or did they always know?

How is your government safeguarding the financial information of Canadian small businesses with respect to the CEBA work being outsourced to Brazil?

Senator Gold: I'm not aware of the details that you ask for in your question. I have every confidence that the government is addressing this matter properly and in accordance with the terms of the contracts that they awarded.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

PROCESSING BACKLOG

Hon. Ratna Omidvar: Senator Gold, yesterday the Auditor General appeared before the Social Affairs Committee and informed us about her audit of certain departments. She disclosed to us that a 2018 commitment by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, to look at its capacity has not been completed and is, therefore, severely impacting processing times. For example, the Auditor General compared two offices — one in Italy and the other in Tanzania — that have roughly the same number of employees. Tanzania, however, receives five times the number of applications.

It's only natural to expect the outcome: A file that gets routed to the Tanzanian office will sit in a backlog for far longer than a file in Rome. This is, in my view, a perfect expression of institutional discrimination.

When will the government follow through with that commitment and reallocate resources to deal with backlogs in certain spots?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question.

Although it is true that all applications are subjected to the same criteria, regardless of the country, it is also true that depending on the nature of the applications, they may take more or less time. I don't have the ability or knowledge to compare applications in Rome to those in Tanzania.

The question of how much human resources can be deployed in any given office is also a matter where, I imagine, there are factors beyond simply a stroke of the pen by the government. I will have to make inquiries, but I understand that the government is continually monitoring this issue. I thank you for bringing it to my attention.

Senator Omidvar: Thank you, Senator Gold, for following up on that.

The Auditor General also found that the average waiting time for privately sponsored refugees is 13 months. This is a program that Canada is rightfully proud of. It talks about it on the world stage. It is engaged in replicating it in different parts of the world. It sets us apart.

So why the long waiting time? Should we not do better than 13 months, Senator Gold?

Senator Gold: We have a global crisis, as we know, with respect to displaced persons. Canada is doing what it can.

My understanding is that the government's goal is to process 80% of all applications within the appropriate service standards and that the IRCC is continuing to work to reduce its backlogs by digitizing applications, hiring new staff and using technologies to improve their ability to process.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

PAYMENTS TO SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): I am still a little dismayed that there are senators here that believe they should do their job, but we, as an official opposition, should not do ours.

Senator Gold, my next question concerns an answer to a written question recently tabled in the other place. It shows that dozens of social media influencers received a total of \$680,000 over the last two years to express support for government programs, without disclosing that they were paid by the Trudeau government to do so.

Leader, I have a question on the Senate Order Paper asking for similar information regarding the payments to these so-called influencers. It has sat there unanswered since March 30, 2021.

Leader, why has the House of Commons question been answered while mine has not? It has been over two and a half years, Senator Gold. Where is the answer? Are you, again, going to say it's my fault for not reminding you, as you did yesterday?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): That's not exactly what I said yesterday, but I think the short answer to your question is that, as I have mentioned in this house before, the House of Commons has a rule that requires the government, whether it likes it or not, whether it likes the question or the questioner or not, to respond within — I believe — 45 days. We have no such rule.

I have suggested in this chamber that the Rules Committee look at granting us an equivalent rule. It's no fun for the Government Representative in the Senate to stand up here and be reminded that questions have not been responded to over that period of time. It is in my interests and those of the Senate to have those answers in a more timely fashion, whether we like the answers or not.

Again, I encourage our committee to take a serious look at that, and we would be pleased to be a part of that process.

Senator Plett: So unless you're forced to answer, you won't answer; is that what you're saying? Why don't you answer voluntarily? Why does the Rules Committee have to force you to answer?

Leader, you have thrown around the words "misinformation" and "disinformation" a lot lately. What do you call the Trudeau government paying a lot of money to influencers to promote your

government without requiring them to disclose that information to their social media followers? If that's not misinformation or disinformation, Senator Gold, then what is?

Senator Gold: Disinformation and misinformation are saying something while knowing that it is incorrect. I will not refrain from characterizing statements that are made in this chamber, from whatever source, as such when it is clear that they are not based upon objective facts validated by third parties.

• (0950)

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

CANADA DISABILITY BENEFIT

Hon. Brent Cotter: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, my question concerns the Canada disability benefit, something I raised a couple of months ago. We are about halfway through the time for the implementation of the benefit based on the minister's signal — I would say commitment — toward it being in place within a year, but there is largely radio silence.

I haven't received an answer to my question — admittedly, asked only a couple of months ago — but, more importantly, hundreds of thousands of working-age people with disabilities and many hundreds of thousands in need are also waiting.

Are you in a position to give us some holiday news of hope for these people?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): I wish I were, because it is an important program, benefit and framework legislation we studied. Alas, I don't have information about that.

I certainly will use my best efforts to encourage those responsible for putting the program in place to finish the work and to get it in place.

Senator Cotter: I wouldn't have asked a supplementary question, Senator Gold, but I don't think "encourage" is good enough.

We still operate under the principle of supremacy of Parliament, where we tell the executive what to do. We passed a law unanimously requiring the executive to deliver this benefit expeditiously. Can we count on that happening?

Senator Gold: This government will respect its legal obligations, as all governments should do, and we expect them to do.

HEALTH

CANNABIS EDIBLES

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Leader, a peer-reviewed study published in January looked at the rate of child hospitalizations from cannabis poisoning in four provinces between January 2015 and September 2021. It showed that cannabis poisonings in children aged nine and younger were more than double in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, where cannabis edibles are permitted, compared to Quebec where edibles in the shape of candies, chocolates or desserts are prohibited. According to this study, the average age of children hospitalized was just three and a half years old.

Leader, since this study was released, what has your government done to better protect small children from accidental cannabis poisoning, particularly from edibles?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): The federal government has, in the legislation that we passed that decriminalized the possession of small amounts for personal use, made the safety requirements for packaging and distribution very clear; that is within federal jurisdiction.

As your question properly notes, each province has taken a different approach to how cannabis products are sold, through private or government stores, and what products can be sold.

It is important that the provinces that are responsible for determining what kind of edibles can be sold do their part as well to ensure that they don't get into the hands of young people. It is also families' responsibilities, if they are buying their own, to store their products in safe and secure places.

It is dangerous for children to take doses of cannabis to which they are not accustomed.

Senator Martin: At the start of this study, before cannabis was legalized, an average of 3 children per month were being hospitalized for cannabis poisoning; by the end of the study, it was an average of 17 children per month.

When the minister was in Senate Question Period a year and a half ago, she said the Trudeau government needed to do better at educating adults and parents. What specifically has been done on this front since then?

Senator Gold: I don't know specifically what educational programs may be ongoing and what the federal involvement in that is.

From day one, as we know in this chamber from our debates, the federal government has taken its responsibility seriously to educate Canadians about the risks associated with inappropriate cannabis use.

ANSWER TO ORDER PAPER QUESTION TABLED

NATIONAL REVENUE—CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the reply to Question No. 188, dated January 31, 2023, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Plett, regarding the Canada Revenue Agency.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 4, 2023-24**

THIRD READING

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) moved third reading of Bill C-60, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024.

She said: Honourable senators, I am pleased to begin third reading as the sponsor of Bill C-60, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. This bill contains the supply requirements for the 2023-24 Supplementary Estimates (B).

I will begin by thanking all senators who were involved in examining these estimates, especially members of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance who conducted a pre-study over the last few weeks.

I would also like to recognize Senator Marshall's work as critic on this bill. We're going to hear from her shortly. It has become a holiday tradition in the Senate. I am sure senators are every bit as excited to hear her speech on this legislation as they are mine — maybe a little more.

With Bill C-60, the government is requesting Parliament's approval of spending detailed in Supplementary Estimates (B). Supplementary estimates outline incremental spending requirements; in other words, they include spending requirements that were either not sufficiently developed when the Main Estimates were presented at the beginning of the fiscal year, or that were refined since to account for recent developments.

Appropriation bills such as this one are the vehicles through which payments from the Consolidated Revenue Fund are authorized for government programs and services. Along with the public accounts, departmental plans and results reports, they provide information that parliamentarians and Canadians can use to scrutinize government spending.

I don't have time to go through the estimates in detail in my remarks, but I will give an overview and touch on key items.

The 2023-24 Supplementary Estimates (B) present a total of \$24.6 billion in incremental budget spending with \$20.7 billion to be voted on. If the estimates are approved, voted budgetary spending would increase by 9.5% to a total of \$239.3 billion.

Much of this new spending can be traced to five important initiatives. The largest spending proposal seeks just over \$8 billion for the department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada for settlement agreements and related compensation; \$2.1 billion is being proposed for the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat to compensate departments and agencies for negotiated salary adjustments; \$500 million for Canada's continued military support for Ukraine; \$458.5 million for the Department of Indigenous Services Canada for coverage of Non-Insured Health Benefits for First Nations and Inuit people and \$430 million for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development to help developing countries address climate change.

These estimates also include changes in planned statutory expenditures, which are forecast to rise by \$3.9 billion to a total of \$240.1 billion. This increase is due to significant investments in programs important to Canadians.

For example, some of the larger proposed items are part of \$2 billion in payments to provinces and territories related to the Canada Health Transfer. Another \$339.1 million is proposed for the interim Canada Dental Benefit for children under 12.

At the same time, these estimates reflect a commitment to being responsible with taxpayer dollars; for instance, they include spending reductions of \$500 million for professional services and travel that will be reinvested into key priority areas.

For the full list of organizations and amounts, I encourage all senators to read the additional information section in the document, which can be found online.

Allow me to go over a few of the major items in more detail. I will start with the government's support for Indigenous peoples and communities.

As I noted, these estimates include over \$8 billion for the department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs to support settlement agreements.

The largest proposed expenditure is \$5 billion for the *Restoule* settlement agreement to compensate 21 First Nations related to the lack of increase to annual payments under the 1850 Robinson-Huron Treaty.

• (1000)

Additionally, there is \$1.6 billion to settle land claims and litigation involving Indigenous people. With active discussions ongoing related to various legal matters, this funding will ensure that the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs is able to quickly implement negotiated settlements, should agreements be reached.

Other settlement agreements funded in these estimates help address a number of priorities for Indigenous communities, including compensation for harms associated with federal Indian day schools; land-related and specific claims and litigation; and flooding due to the Ear Falls hydroelectric dam.

There are also several key items in these estimates related to the Department of National Defence. That department is presenting an increase in planned spending of \$1.6 billion, of which \$1.4 billion needs parliamentary approval. These planned expenditures support various priorities, including the \$500 million that I mentioned earlier regarding military assistance to Ukraine, as Canada continues to provide the military training and equipment that Ukraine desperately needs to defend its freedom and independence; \$146.1 million for the Heyder Beattie Final Settlement Agreement, which compensates members of the Canadian military who experienced sexual misconduct; and \$118.5 million for expanded contributions to NATO as Canada works with allies to address global challenges and build a safer world.

The final major expenses that I'll cover are related to the federal public service. These estimates include \$2.1 billion for the compensation adjustments resulting from collective agreements concluded and the terms and conditions of employment updated between April and June 2023. This includes funding for agreements with various unions, including the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, as well as increases for unrepresented employees, and adjustments to previously signed agreements. There is also an additional \$359.3 million for public service group insurance plans. This will help ensure the financial sustainability of the plans in response to cost increases driven by price inflation and population growth.

Those are some highlights of the spending increases in these estimates. Now I'll return to a point that I made earlier about reducing and refocusing government spending.

Senators may remember that, in Budget 2023, the government committed to reducing spending by \$15.4 billion over five years and \$4.5 billion annually thereafter. To this end, the government is proposing two main measures in these estimates.

The first is reducing spending on professional services, travel and operations, and the second is a phased-in reduction of roughly 3% of eligible spending by departments and agencies by 2026-27. These measures are designed to target eligible discretionary funding.

Since Budget 2023 was introduced, the Treasury Board Secretariat has worked with the departments to determine the base of eligible discretionary spending for these reviews so that

savings can be appropriately targeted. Proposals have been submitted to the Treasury Board Secretariat, and the work to assess them is under way.

Supplementary Estimates (B) includes information on the first block of these savings, with reductions of \$500 million across professional services and travel for the 2023-24 fiscal year. More information on the reduction affecting 2024-25 and future years will be available in the 2024-25 Main Estimates and Departmental Plans.

As I've said, for this and all other aspects of these estimates, more detailed information is available online in the supporting documents. The estimates family of documents provides important insight into the government's use of public funds. The proposed spending and spending reductions in these estimates reflect a commitment to important Canadian priorities, from investing in Indigenous communities to providing military assistance in Ukraine, all the while treating taxpayer dollars responsibly.

Honourable senators, I hope you will join me in adopting this important bill. Thank you. *Hiy hiy.*

Hon. Denise Batters: Thank you. I just want to make sure that I got this right because, obviously, Ukraine is very important to many Canadians and me personally.

At one point in your speech, when you were stating the highlights, I think you may have misspoken and said it's \$5 billion to Ukraine, but then when you were talking about the Department of National Defence amount being a total of \$1.6 billion, I think I heard you say it's \$5 million for the Ukraine military amount. Could you please clarify which one it is?

Senator LaBoucane-Benson: Thank you, senator. You are absolutely correct; it's \$500 million.

Senator Batters: Is it \$500 million for Ukraine, or \$5 million? I think, at one point in your speech, you said \$5 billion, and then, at another point, I think you said \$5 million — and now you're saying it's \$500 million for Ukraine. Which one is it?

Senator LaBoucane-Benson: Senator, I believe I said twice in my speech that it's \$500 million in military assistance to Ukraine, but, if I misspoke, my apologies.

Hon. Elizabeth Marshall: Honourable senators, I want to thank Senator LaBoucane-Benson very much for her remarks. I could follow along with the dollar amounts, so thanks very much for your comments.

Bill C-60 is the fourth appropriation bill for this year. It is requesting an additional \$20.7 billion and, when approved, will increase funding — through appropriation bills this year — to \$239 billion.

Before I continue, and for the benefit of our new senators, the appropriation bill — Bill C-60 — is supported by the Supplementary Estimates (B) document, and I think that confuses people a lot of times. Additional detailed information on Bill C-60 may be found in Supplementary Estimates (B).

The \$239 billion, along with the statutory spending of \$240 billion, accounts for \$479 billion in spending so far this year.

Appropriation bills do not include all of the government's spending. Other legislation also gives authority to the government to spend money. Spending approved by other legislation includes Old Age Security payments, which are authorized by the Old Age Security Act; Canada health payments, which are authorized by the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act; and interest on unmatured debt, which is authorized by the Financial Administration Act.

The amount of spending authorized by legislation other than appropriation bills is called statutory spending. Almost half of all spending is statutory. For example, 48% of spending in 2020-21 was statutory, while it was 45% in 2021-22 and 46% in 2022-23.

It's of benefit to the government to include as much spending as possible in other legislation — as statutory spending — rather than including it in appropriation bills. Spending included in appropriation bills is studied by parliamentary committees on an ongoing basis, while statutory spending does not receive the same level of scrutiny.

Of the \$20 billion being requested in this bill, the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs is requesting the largest amount, which is \$9 billion. The Treasury Board Secretariat is requesting \$2.5 billion, which is the second-highest request, while the Department of National Defence is third with their request of \$1.4 billion.

Altogether, these three organizations are requesting \$13 billion of the \$20 billion, which is almost two thirds of the funding request.

This bill also includes \$2.8 billion for 74 Budget 2023 initiatives. Along with the Budget 2023 initiatives that were included in Supplementary Estimates (A), the government will have \$10 billion to implement its Budget 2023 initiatives. However, analysis carried out by the Parliamentary Budget Officer indicates that this is only 60% of the Budget 2023 initiatives, and about \$6 billion has yet to be funded this year as planned. If these initiatives do not go ahead this year, the deficit should be reduced by that \$6 billion.

Last year at this time, 90% of the Budget 2022 initiatives had been funded, which raises the question as to why the government is so slow in requesting the money for the Budget 2023 initiatives. Last March, Budget 2023 forecasted a deficit of

\$40.1 billion, while the fiscal update — released last week — is forecasting a deficit of \$40 billion. It's \$40.1 billion compared to \$40 billion. In other words, the forecasted deficit is unchanged.

By slowing down the implementation of budget initiatives, the government can control the bottom line — that is, its deficit — so that it hits its deficit right on the nose.

Of course, there are other reasons for the delay in requesting funding for the Budget 2023 initiatives, and we will receive an update on unfunded initiatives when Supplementary Estimates (C) is tabled in February or March.

• (1010)

One initiative in Budget 2023 is spending reductions of \$14 billion over five years. This includes targeted reductions of \$500 million in consulting, professional services and travel this year, along with reductions of \$1.65 billion in each of the following four years for a total of \$7 billion.

The government has published online the frozen allotments of \$500 million for this fiscal year by organization.

Minister Anand, in her recent press conference on Supplementary Estimates (B), told us that \$350 million of this \$500 million will reduce professional services, while the remaining \$150 million will reduce travel. So, my following comments relate to the reduction of \$350 million this year only in professional services because detailed data is not available for travel.

A comparison of last year's Supplementary Estimates (B) and this year's Supplementary Estimates (B) indicates that the budget for professional services has actually increased from \$20.5 billion last year to \$21.6 billion this year, an increase of more than \$1 billion. The \$350-million reduction, which Minister Anand spoke about in professional services, is being imposed on the increased funding of \$1 billion. The budget for professional services is not being reduced. Rather, it is being increased by over \$700 million. And this is before the next appropriation bill, which will provide even more money for professional services.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, testifying at our National Finance Committee, said that it is very surprising to see the budget for professional services increase significantly when the government has clearly stated its intention to reduce the use of professional and special services.

For this year, the Department of National Defence has been allocated the highest reduction in professional services in the amount of \$211 million. The second-highest reduction of \$34.5 million has been allocated to the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

The Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations is requesting \$9 billion of the \$20 billion in this bill, primarily for specific claims, settlements and litigation. Many of the discussions at our

Finance Committee meetings centred around this funding request. Of the \$9 billion, \$5 billion is for the *Restoule* settlement agreement. The governments of Canada and Ontario have reached an agreement in principle with 21 First Nations related to past annual payments under the 1850 Robinson-Huron Treaty.

The treaty includes a clause indicating that annuities would be increased as long as the wealth generated from the territories could support such an increase. Since there has been no increase in the payments since 1875, in 2018 the Ontario Superior Court ruled that the Crown had a duty to increase annual payments to treaty beneficiaries. Once the agreement is finalized, the \$5 billion will be paid into a trust established by the First Nations.

Another \$1.6 billion of the \$9 billion requested by the department is for the settlement of land-related claims and litigation, and this money will be used to fund negotiated settlements should agreements be reached. And \$651 million of the \$9 billion being requested is for the Federal Indian Day Schools settlement. It includes compensation for persons who attended a federally established, funded, controlled and operated Indian day school from January 1, 1920, until its closure or transfer from Canada's control.

Several issues were discussed during our committee meetings relating to these claims. The Parliamentary Budget Officer, during testimony, said that it is a bit concerning that specific claims and liabilities have increased so much. He said that it raises the question as to how firmly in control the government is with respect to these claims if we keep discovering new claims, which are supposed to be based on historical facts. He went on to say it is a bit disconcerting to see these liabilities increasing so much when we've had so much time to figure them out.

Of particular concern to me is the way in which these claims are disclosed in the accounts of the government. While \$5 billion is identified in Supplementary Estimates (B) this year as funding for the *Restoule* settlement agreement, it is not possible to identify where it is recorded in the public accounts and in which year. This is a serious problem because \$5 billion is a significant amount, and we should know in which year it is being recorded as an expenditure in the Public Accounts of Canada.

Last year, \$2.8 billion was approved by the Federal Court of Canada for the Gottfriedson Band class settlement agreement. The funding for this \$2.8 billion was included in the second appropriation bill for 2023-24, and the expenditure was actually recorded the previous year in the 2022-23 public accounts.

It is a large transaction, with funding provided in one year and the expenditure recorded in the public accounts the previous year. While it was possible to extract information on the \$2.8-billion Gottfriedson Band class settlement agreement to determine when the money was provided, which is this year, and when the expenditure was recorded, which was last year, this is not always the case.

Last year's public accounts, which were released in October, indicate that \$26 billion related to Indigenous claims were recorded last year. The specific claims and related dollar amounts are not disclosed, and officials, during testimony, committed to providing details on the \$26 billion to our Finance Committee.

It is important to recognize that the deficit for last year was \$35 billion, and if this \$26 billion had not been recorded, the deficit would have been reduced by \$26 billion to \$9 billion. So, we could have had a \$9-billion deficit. This is clearly pointed out on page 12 of volume 1 of last year's public accounts. But it's increasingly difficult for parliamentarians and especially for members of the Finance Committee to track claims and settlement agreements. During committee meetings earlier this year, officials from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations told us that there were about 500 of these claims, so parliamentary oversight is difficult, if not impossible.

The government has disclosed more precise numbers. There are 83 comprehensive land claims under negotiation, accepted for negotiation or under review. In addition, there are also 698 specific claims under negotiation, accepted for negotiation or under review. And these are in addition to general litigation claims and special claims.

Estimates for the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations have seen a significant increase over the past four years. Estimates for the past four years commencing in 2021 amounted to \$6.8 billion. It went to \$7 billion in 2021-22, \$13.7 billion last year, and \$26 billion so far this year. Parliamentary oversight is imperative.

Of the \$2.5 billion requested by the Treasury Board Secretariat, \$2 billion is to compensate departments and agencies for the costs of collective bargaining agreements and other related adjustments to the terms and conditions of employment. These costs arise from agreements concluded from April to June of this year, increases for unrepresented employees and adjustments related to some previously signed agreements. Compare these amounts for Supplementary Estimates (B), requesting \$4.2 billion, to last year, when the request was \$2.3 billion. It's quite a significant increase. That will increase personnel costs so far this year to \$58.2 billion.

Updated information on personnel costs for this year will be available when Supplementary Estimates (C) are released in February or March of next year.

The Department of National Defence is requesting \$1.375 billion, which is the third-highest amount requested after Crown-Indigenous Relations and the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Of the \$1.375 billion, \$583 million is for compensation and benefits for the Canadian Armed Forces; \$500 million is for military aid to Ukraine; \$118 million is for the expanded contributions to NATO; and \$50 million is for Operation UNIFIER, which is Canada's support for Ukraine.

There's \$4 million being transferred from the capital account of the Department of National Defence to other departments. While the \$4-million transfer is explained, there is no information provided on the remaining capital budget of \$6 billion, including which capital projects are being funded by the \$6 billion. This has been an ongoing problem.

• (1020)

The 2017 defence policy did indicate capital funding by year, but not the capital projects that were to be funded. In any event, the limited information provided in the 2017 defence policy is now outdated and has been for some time. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report last year on the \$164 billion earmarked for capital projects in the 2017 defence policy over a 20-year time period for 348 capital projects. That report indicated that the government underspent in the first four years of the defence policy and has significantly shifted expenditures to future fiscal years beginning in 2025 through to 2037. For example, the initial 2017 estimate for capital spending in that department for 2027-28 was \$12.6 billion, but according to revised projections, it is now \$16.3 billion, indicating a shifting forward of \$3.7 billion.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's report from last year indicated that planned spending under the 2017 defence policy would be \$11 billion during this year. It remains at \$11 billion under the updated 2022 profile. However, according to Supplementary Estimates (B), funding for capital expenditures for this year is only \$6 billion, not \$11 billion, an underfunding of \$5 billion.

We do not know what projects are included in the list of the 348 projects, nor do we know which projects are included in the estimated \$11 billion in the defence policy for this year, nor do we know the projects included in the \$6 billion indicated in Supplementary Estimates (B). Given the lack of information on National Defence funding requirements, it is obvious there is a lack of transparency in the information provided by the Department of National Defence.

The Department of Finance is requesting \$3.4 million, of which \$2.8 million is for a Budget 2022 initiative entitled "The financial sector legislative review." This review is to focus on the digitalization of money and the stability and security of the financial sector, with the first phase of the review to be directed at digital currencies, including crypto-currencies and stablecoins.

Budget 2022 indicated the cost would be \$17.7 million starting last year. There's no explanation why commencement of the project was delayed until this year.

Supplementary Estimates (B) also discloses statutory payments of \$2 billion to provinces and territories in accordance with the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act. The \$2 billion is included in Budget 2023 and was further announced in June. The \$2 billion is to address urgent pressures in emergency rooms, operating rooms and pediatric hospitals.

While the \$2 billion in funding is disclosed in supplementary estimates for this year, it is recorded in the government's accounts for last year, that is, the 2022-23 public accounts. It's

just another transaction which demonstrates that the estimates documents do not align with the public accounts, thus confusing readers.

Public debt servicing costs continue to be a concern, but these are statutory payments, so government already has the authority under the Financial Administration Act to make these payments. Updates are provided in supplementary estimates documents for information purposes only. There is no updated information in Supplementary Estimates (B) on public debt servicing costs. However, the Fall Economic Statement indicates that debt servicing costs continue to increase significantly, from \$35 billion last year to an estimated \$46.5 billion this year. Next year, we will see another significant increase from the \$46.5 billion to \$52.4 billion, with continuing increases over the next several years to \$60.7 billion in 2028-29.

I will have additional comments on these debt servicing costs when we resume sitting in the new year.

Honourable senators, as I indicated in my opening remarks, this bill is the fourth appropriation bill for this year. We expect a fifth appropriation bill in February or March of next year.

Accordingly, this bill summarizes government's request for money so far this year. Additional money will be requested again in the next appropriation bill.

This concludes my comments on the government's fourth appropriation bill. In closing, I extend my appreciation to our Finance Committee chair, Senator Mockler, our deputy chair, Senator Forest, as well as all my committee colleagues for their insightful questions and discussions during our meetings. I also extend my appreciation to our staff who ensure our meetings are productive and run smoothly.

Thank you, colleagues.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Are honourable senators ready for the question?

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: All those in favour of the motion please say "yea."

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: All those against please say "nay."

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: I believe the “yeas” have it.

And two honourable senators having risen:

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Do we have agreement on a bell?

An Hon. Senator: Fifteen minutes.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Fifteen minutes. The vote will happen at 10:40 a.m.

Call in the senators.

• (1040)

Motion agreed to and bill read third time and passed on the following division:

YEAS THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Arnot	Hartling
Aucoin	Kingston
Audette	Klyne
Boniface	Kutcher
Burey	LaBoucane-Benson
Busson	Loffreda
Cardozo	Moncion
Clement	Moodie
Cordy	Omidvar
Cormier	Osler
Coyle	Pate
Cuzner	Patterson (<i>Ontario</i>)
Dalphond	Petitclerc
Dasko	Petten
Dean	Prosper
Forest	Quinn
Francis	Ravalia
Galvez	Ringuette
Gerba	Ross
Gignac	Saint-Germain
Gold	Tannas
Greenwood	Woo
Harder	Yussuff—46

NAYS THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Ataullahjan	Martin
Batters	Plett
Boisvenu	Poirier

Carignan
Housakos
Marshall

Richards
Seidman—11

ABSTENTIONS THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Nil

THE SENATE

MOTION TO CALL UPON THE HONG KONG AUTHORITIES TO RELEASE JIMMY LAI ADOPTED

Leave having been given to proceed to Motions, Order No. 175:

Hon. Pierre J. Dalphond, pursuant to notice of December 14, 2023, moved:

That, given that:

- (a) Jimmy Lai stands for so many of the values championed by Canadians, most importantly media freedom, respect for the rule of law, and standing up for what is right;
- (b) Mr. Lai is a peaceful pro-democracy campaigner and publisher whose hugely popular newspaper Apple Daily was shut down for political reasons in 2021;
- (c) Mr. Lai has just spent his 76th birthday in prison where he has been for the last three years on charges brought under the National Security Law, whose provisions are inconsistent with international human rights law; and
- (d) Mr. Lai is about to face trial on yet further charges arising from his pro-democracy writing and campaigning that could see him spend the rest of his life behind bars;

the Senate call upon the Hong Kong authorities to release Jimmy Lai and cease prosecuting him and others charged under the National Security Law and the Senate reaffirms journalists and media workers everywhere have the right to operate in an environment free from intimidation and harassment by state authorities.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

• (1050)

STUDY ON ISSUES RELATING TO HUMAN RIGHTS GENERALLY

SEVENTH REPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE AND REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE ADOPTED

Leave having been given to proceed to Other Business, Reports of Committees, Other, Order No. 69:

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the seventh report (interim) of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, entitled *Anti-Black Racism, Sexism and Systemic Discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Commission*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on December 11, 2023.

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan moved:

That the seventh report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, entitled *Anti-Black Racism, Sexism and Systemic Discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Commission*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on December 11, 2023, be adopted and that, pursuant to rule 12-23(1), the Senate request a complete and detailed response from the government, with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada being identified as minister responsible for responding to the report, in consultation with the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Labour and Seniors, and the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

THE SENATE

MOTION TO URGE GOVERNMENT TO RECOGNIZE THE ERASURE OF AFGHAN WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM PUBLIC LIFE AS GENDER APARTHEID—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Leave having been given to proceed to Motions, Order No. 139:

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan, pursuant to notice of September 19, 2023, moved:

That the Senate call on the Government of Canada to recognize the erasure of Afghan women and girls from public life as gender apartheid.

She said: Honourable senators, the very first school for girls opened its doors in Afghanistan about a century ago, and the women in Afghanistan were given the right to vote in 1919, years before the women in the U.K. By 1991, 7,000 women were

enrolled in higher education, 230,000 girls were attending school, 190 women were professors, and 22,000 women taught in schools across the country.

On a personal note, I always loved visiting Kabul. Men and women co-existed side by side without gendered rules or prejudice. Women wore Western attire and owned businesses. I fondly remember my favourite sidewalk cafe, Khyber, was owned by a woman.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to 10 years of civil war and, with it, intense discrimination and violence against Afghan women as a military strategy to repress insurgency. Sadly, the Taliban regime that followed only served to further strip women and girls of their human rights. For example, by 2001, girls had stopped attending school altogether. However, Afghan women and girls are resilient.

I would like to take a moment to share with you the story of one such Pashtun woman. Those of you who know the history of that region know that Pashtun women are fearless warriors, and I think some of you might know one who sits with you in this chamber.

This Pashtun young woman, Malalai of Maiwand, was the daughter of a shepherd, and she was born in 1860. On the day of the battle against the British, Malalai, as a woman would in those days, supported the fighters by tending to the wounded, providing water and supplying guns. As she saw that the Pashtun fighters were losing heart, she took off her veil — and taking off the veil in our Pashtun culture has a lot of significance, but that's a story for another day — and she shouted “young love” because her fiancé was one of the fighters. She said, “Young love, if you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand, by God, someone is saving you as a symbol of shame.”

This gave new resolve to the fighters. When the flag bearer was struck down, it was once again Malalai who made a flag out of her veil and led the men into battle. Although they emerged victorious, Malalai lost her life on the battlefield. She was only 19. The day of the Battle of Maiwand was meant to be her wedding day.

Honourable senators, just to give you a bit of history, that region, the surrounding area in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, has seen 60 wars in the past 300 years. That means a war every five years.

By 2021, women had secured nearly 30% of the seats in Parliament. They were represented by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and laws were put in place to protect their human rights. For example, women were finally able to include their name on their children's birth certificates and identification, and violence against women was a crime. Women were making gains once again, and Canada was actively working to empower Afghan women and girls through training and grants.

Yet, they lost everything once again two years ago when the Taliban took over the country. Their first order of business was to order women to stay at home, justifying this act of gender apartheid as a safety measure, as their foot soldiers were “. . . not familiar with seeing women outside the house and were not trained to respect women.”

Afghan women's rights have since been stripped away, every new edict further erasing them from a society they helped build. Since, the Taliban have issued 80 edicts, 54 directly targeting women and girls, who are now essentially confined to their homes, being unable to work or visit parks, gyms and public bathing houses or even attend school beyond the sixth grade. There have been reports of a sharp increase in Afghan women taking their own lives rather than living in the shadows without any hope for the future.

As I was getting ready to speak, it was reported yesterday that women who face gender violence are being put in prison, supposedly for their safety. How bad can it be?

Colleagues, we are witnessing the complete erasure of women and girls in Afghanistan, and I worry that if we do not act now, this will embolden other countries where women's rights are silently and progressively being rolled back.

In its silence, Canada is complicit. Therefore, I call upon the Canadian government to recognize the situation in Afghanistan as gender apartheid. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Patterson (*Ontario*), debate adjourned.)

POINT OF ORDER WITHDRAWN

Hon. Andrew Cardozo: Honourable senators, I rise to respond to the comments made by Senator Don Platt yesterday in what he said was a point of order. I will address two things, first to say that this is not a point of order, and second to explain clearly why my name is connected to this letter.

Before I get into the details, let me say this: This letter was not anonymous by any stretch. I was asked by a friend, Mr. Carl Nicholson, to help draft a letter, which I did. I assumed he made any changes he wanted to and sent it to the committee members in the House as his letter, with his name and email address clearly stated, sent by him from his computer. The metadata shows my name because I wrote the first draft, but the letter remains that of Mr. Nicholson.

• (1100)

I do not see that this is a point of order, as I cannot identify a Senate rule that has been breached by any action in the Senate. Page 215 of *Senate Procedure in Practice* defines a point of order as follows:

A point of order is a complaint or question raised by a senator who believes that the rules, procedures or customary practices of the Senate have been incorrectly applied or overlooked during chamber or committee proceedings. . . .

Nothing raised by the senator relates to the supposed incorrect application of the rules, procedures or customary practices in the chamber or committee proceedings. The allegation that I helped someone write a letter to express their view is something I readily confirm. This is not a point of order. It is an expression of opinion from the senator, inappropriately framed as a point of order.

Your Honour, I would say a little by way of context. As a Canadian patriot and nationalist who is deeply proud to serve in the Parliament of Canada, the election of the Honourable Greg Fergus as Speaker in the other house was a source of great pride and happiness. After over a century and a half of existence, by popular vote, the first Black Canadian Speaker of one of our houses of Parliament was elected. I'm sure every Canadian had some sense of pride in this. I was happy to see the images of both Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Leader of the Opposition, Pierre Poilievre, dragging Mr. Fergus to his seat, as is the custom in that place.

Your Honour, you will be glad that you did not have to endure the indignity of being dragged to your seat when you became Speaker of this house of sober second thought.

I also revelled to see the images of Speaker Fergus in the Speaker's robes with the three-pointed hat and a great big, proud smile, all in place with one new and exciting factor — that it was a Black person in that uniform.

So when there was a major attempt to drag him down a bare two months later, it hit many Canadians like a punch in the gut. To be frank, it felt like it cut right into my soul. It was deeply concerning. Colleagues, I want you to understand that this attempted political takedown cut deeply into the very being of many of us who are people of colour and, I would add, many people who have dedicated their lives to racial equality, whatever their background.

Over the last weekend, many of us were talking to people as the Procedure and House Affairs Committee was about to undertake their review at high speed, leaving no room for Canadians to formally participate. For many, this kind of swift process can breed cynicism and distrust in our political system, something I want to see avoided whenever possible.

To some, this might seem like a minor internal issue. I ask you to see the different paradigm that other Canadians were seeing — that it was a major national issue that spoke to who we are as a people. Who gets to participate, and who doesn't? With all due respect, including to Mr. Fergus — and my guess is that he understands this — him becoming Speaker and then this role being threatened was less about him as an individual and more about the symbolism, message and history of this country that is being written here and now.

To many of us, it was a great moment in Canadian history when he was elected — and would be a terrible moment in our history if he were taken down so fast for what we now see other Speakers have done before. This is why people ask: Why do Black people face a different standard of justice than White people?

Those of us who felt sick over this were deeply concerned about this negative campaign and what it means for our beloved country. It was a historic wrong that was about to happen in real time, and Canadians had no way to participate.

When a good friend, who was deeply troubled about the affairs in Parliament, asked me to help draft a letter, I was pleased to do just that — draft a letter, which he finalized and sent in his name. There was nothing anonymous about it. This was perfectly acceptable in my role as a Canadian and a Canadian senator.

I am left wondering if there's a pattern. First, there is an attempt to marginalize a Black person who occupies one of the most senior positions in our democratic system, and then the writer of a letter, who even identified himself as a Black person, is marginalized as not worthy of signing his own name to the letter. Instead, his letter is attributed to the person who suggested the first draft.

Senators, consider this irony: To ignore Mr. Nicholson's ownership of this letter he sent is to deny the ownership of every letter that every senator has ever signed that he or she has not drafted themselves. This institution, according to this definition, has produced thousands of anonymous letters throughout the history of Canada. We never refer to senators as sending anonymous letters, so why do so here?

As the kids say, "Hmm. Interesting."

You may not know Mr. Nicholson, but let me say a few words about this Canadian who has made major contributions in Ottawa and elsewhere. His earlier career was in international development in Africa, and over the last two or three decades, he's been the executive director of the Catholic Centre for Immigrants, which is where I met him and was impressed with his accomplishments for that venerable organization. He has served on the Police Services Board and received numerous awards. He is a husband, father and grandfather, as well as a thoughtful and strategic thinker in advancing equality who has helped and mentored many young Canadians.

His wise counsel has been sought by mayors of Ottawa and immigration ministers of all parties, so he deserves the dignity of having his name and identity recognized. And for your information, this letter was drafted on my personal laptop, clearly, over that weekend.

Senator Plett made another comment, saying:

I'm pretty sure Senator Cardozo would be the first to jump up if Pierre Poilievre sent a letter to members of the Senate Ethics Committee asking them to go easy on a Conservative senator. . . .

That is, of course, completely gratuitous. It only speaks to the senator's partisanship, not mine. Indeed, a few days ago, Mr. Poilievre and another party voted to send us their views about Bill C-234 and tell us what to do. I welcomed that intervention, because I believe interaction between our two chambers is a good thing.

You will know that I am a strong proponent of this and have organized meetings between our two chambers. You will be aware that a few days ago, when two ministers were here, as I asked a question, I welcomed them here and asked them to increase their interaction with us. I did the same with Minister Guilbeault in this chamber a couple of weeks ago. In June, I

hosted a very nice gathering in my office for the Honourable Erin O'Toole, who was about to retire, and it was attended by members of Parliament and senators of all affiliations.

So, Senator Plett, here is my request to you: that you and I co-organize a conversation with Mr. Poilievre — in my office or yours — and I'm happy to take a shot at drafting the letter of invitation.

I want to talk about one other issue that the senator mentioned. He said, and I paraphrase: "What I do take issue with is that the letter was written by a senator who is not Black."

I don't know what the answer is to that question, but let me share a couple of things with you as to how I come to my approach to this life.

I think all of us who have kids or young people in our lives learn from them. I recall my son, when he was about four or five years old, was getting into trouble in the schoolyard. I remember trying to work through it with him. The reason he was getting into trouble was because he played with a bunch of friends who would pick on a couple of other kids. My son would stand up for those kids and stop the bullying, and ultimately he would get into trouble because he would be in some kind of fight.

• (1110)

I had to talk to him about that. The only thing I could think of saying to him was, "You weren't bullied. Leave those kids alone and turn the other way." I never said that to him. He wouldn't have tolerated it at his age, but at his little age of 4 or 5, in his little mind and his little conscience, he knew he had to do something.

My daughter educated me about gender diversity and gender expression, even though it's an issue that does not affect her personally. My kids have educated me about these issues, and I appreciate that.

Look around this room. Senator Wells, who, as far as I know, is not a farmer and not from the grain drying industry, educated us about grain drying because he believed it was important. Senator Moodie, who is not from the child-care industry, educated us about national child care.

When I went across the room a few weeks ago when there was a kerfuffle, and three women senators were under threat, it seemed, I didn't do that because I was a woman or because I was a member of the Independent Senators Group. Senator Loffreda sponsored the Hellenic Heritage Month Bill, even though he's not a Greek Canadian.

In response to the good senator, I would only say that I really hope that it is not only Black Canadians who stand up for Black people, and for that matter, not only Maritimers who speak up about the Chignecto Isthmus. As senators, we have a duty to care for each other.

Colleagues, I really appreciate your time this Friday morning as I respond to this attempted point of order that was brought in almost under the cover of darkness yesterday. Expect me to

always stand with Canadians who seek justice and look to parliamentarians to be fair, considerate and just. If I stop doing that, I don't deserve to take a seat in this Parliament.

Your Honour, I think you will agree that this is a frivolous allegation and not a point of order by any stretch. Thank you, colleagues.

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I'll be very brief. It's Christmas and we want to talk about things other than this.

I do want to make a few comments to what Senator Cardozo said and some of the allegations he made. Under the cover of darkness? There were a lot of senators here. I did it at a proper opportunity. There was no proper opportunity yesterday to do this unless I wanted to interfere with Senate business, so I waited until the end of Senate business, as I properly should have.

Senator Cardozo was in the chamber, and I addressed him directly. Fine, Senator Cardozo, I wasn't going to say that, but you said it. You walked out of the chamber. That was not my fault, Senator Cardozo, that you left before I was ready to speak. I am not going to come over and ask you to stay in your seat. You can be out of the chamber at any time you want.

It took Senator Cardozo four days to speak to this matter. He had four days before I ever raised the issue, and if he had done that, this never would have been raised by me.

Today, when I wanted to table a document, with leave, to deal with the accusations that Senator Cardozo's legal counsel yesterday talked about — that it was an anonymous letter, and I had no right to do that — the legal counsel denied me leave to table that document, a document that was going to show what happened, a document that was going to make this transparent.

And instead, Senator Dalphond, a legal scholar, a judge, says that we don't need the evidence. Let's deal with this with no evidence. Then he comes and asks me, "But are you going to give me leave for my motion?" And I said, "Absolutely, because I'm not the type of person who denies somebody leave when something is important."

Senator Cardozo has spent a lot of time talking about that this is about the fact that Greg Fergus is a Black man. It is not about that, Senator Cardozo, and I am offended by you suggesting that it is. This is about a Speaker doing something that a Speaker should not do, attending a partisan event. This is not about the opposition going after the Speaker. Every party, including the Liberal Party, was offended by what he did. Greg Fergus apologized for what he did. Why? Because he had done something wrong, or he wouldn't have apologized.

Yes, they have a tradition of dragging somebody in, and you actually believe that he had to be dragged in? He ran for an election. He didn't go into that seat involuntarily. He wanted the position. He ran for it.

You also referenced other Speakers who have done the same thing, and I know, in all likelihood, you're talking about Andrew Scheer, who has been in the news. No, Senator Cardozo, that's

false. Andrew Scheer did not do that when he was the Speaker. Andrew Scheer did that after he was the Speaker. You want to make allegations? Check your facts.

I'm not going to belabour this, Your Honour. As a matter of fact, in the spirit of Christmas, when I'm done speaking here, I'm quite happy to drop this and not even ask you to take this under advisement and to rule. I raised the point of order because I wanted it on the record. It's on the record. Senator Cardozo did something that Senator Cardozo, as a senator, should not do. If Senator Cardozo wants to write a letter personally endorsing a Speaker in the other place, endorsing a member in an election, campaigning in an election, he has every right to do so. I do it all the time.

But as a senator, he has certain obligations, and he conspired with another person and used Senate resources to send a letter that he should not have sent. There's no question about that, none. It may not be a point of order, but it is certainly unethical for us to use Senate resources to send the type of letter or help others send the type of letter using Senate resources. We have been called to the carpet for using Senate resources for things that we should not be doing, and that is what Senator Cardozo did.

I'm going to stop there. Again, in light of the Christmas spirit, I have spoken to it. Senator Cardozo has spoken to it. If everybody else in this chamber is willing to drop it at this point, then I also am, Your Honour.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I understand that the point of order has been withdrawn.

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Since the year is drawing to a close, we will proceed to end of session remarks, and I will ask Senator Gold to start us off.

[English]

EXPRESSION OF GOOD WISHES FOR THE SEASON

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, we're finally here, and, in my humble opinion, I'm happy to leave 2023 in the rear-view mirror, log it into the history books and get out of Dodge, as they say in the westerns. I'm dating myself.

[Translation]

The end of the year is often a time for reflection. This year, we sadly bid farewell to a number of our colleagues, but we have also welcomed many new faces to the institution. Their breadth of experience is a valuable asset, and I look forward to working with each and every one of them.

[English]

Our deliberations were not always easy. Reaching the finish line was sometimes in doubt, but with conversation, a little bit of arm-twisting, an occasional dram or two and, most importantly, goodwill and a desire that we all share to serve Canadians, we got where we needed to be.

• (1120)

In a Westminster parliamentary system such as ours, where various points of view are always represented — and properly so — we all must put a bit of water in our wine from time to time. I want to thank my leadership colleagues — Senator Saint-Germain, Senator Plett, Senator Cordy and Senator Tannas — for watering down their favourite libations, when necessary, so that our work for Canadians could get done.

Raymonde, Don, Jane and Scott, it's a real pleasure working with you, and I appreciate your collaboration.

[Translation]

None of what we do would be possible without our wonderful staff, those who research, write, advise, organize our days and point us in the right direction. I would be lost in the Office of the Government Representative without those who take their work and responsibilities very seriously, and who work at all hours of the night or very early in the morning.

[English]

Everyone in this place understands the value of our staff, and we should be taking more than this once-a-year opportunity to express our appreciation, as I know that you do, and I hope that our staff knows that we do as well.

I also want to thank my colleagues Senator LaBoucane-Benson and Senator Audette and, until her appointment as our Speaker, Senator Gagné, without whom I would simply be lost. There's no better way to put it. You were always there to keep our priorities straight, to pick up the pieces when you needed to and to give me a boost when I needed it, and give me a shot when I needed it too. We were each other's sounding boards and cheerleaders, and, whatever we accomplished, we did it together. Thank you.

To our former Speaker, George Furey, and to our newest Speaker, Senator Gagné, thank you for keeping us on track and for appealing to our better angels.

[Translation]

Many thanks to our Clerk, table officers, pages, Parliamentary Protective Service officers, committee clerks, interpreters, cafeteria staff and maintenance personnel. So many people help us do our work for Canadians, and it is much appreciated. Many thanks.

[English]

On a personal note, let me thank my wife, Nancy, who has been by my side for these last seven years. I remember very well the day I was sworn in, and how Speaker Furey reminded us all

of the toll that this takes on our partners and our spouses. To my wife, Nancy, and to all of your partners and spouses, thank you for your support.

To colleagues, these last few months have been dark days for my community, and you have been so supportive and helpful. It is hugely important and appreciated.

This is the season of goodwill, and whether you celebrate in a church, in a mosque, in a synagogue, in a temple or around your family table, from me to you, may you be blessed with health and happiness. And, please, may 2024 bring peace to all and to this world.

Happy holidays.

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, like all of you, I am also happy that this will be my last speech of the year. I do have unlimited time.

Colleagues, it's been an unusually difficult end of the session. Senator Gold already alluded, at least partly, to that. But here we are, going into the most festive season of the year where we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus and our Saviour.

Prior to my sharing my best wishes for the season, I want to take time today to reflect a little bit on those less fortunate.

As reported many times, there is a troubling increase in the need of support from food banks, combined with an alarming increase in homelessness in our country. As we celebrate Christmas in our homes, with our turkey dinners, let's remember that more and more Canadians are struggling.

Furthermore, we have lost a number of colleagues, and many of our colleagues have lost loved ones in the last year. The holiday season is always the most difficult time for those people.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helps make this place run. I want to thank all the individuals who keep us safe, from the Senate security team to the Parliamentary Protective Service to the Office of the Usher of the Black Rod. You treat us well and, so often, beyond what we deserve. For that, we are grateful.

I'm always amazed by the professionalism that our pages show us. Thank you for your service.

I'm also grateful to the clerks, the table officers and Senate client services, as well as the maintenance, operations and administrative staff. Your collaboration and dedicated work does not go unnoticed. Thank you.

Thank you to some of those who kept me out far too late last night. I hope you have a headache this morning.

A very special thank you to my own staff. You go way above and beyond expectations. Thank you.

To my caucus and my leadership, the support you have shown is appreciated, and we don't mention it often enough. Thank you for your support.

Thank you to our Speaker and our Speaker pro tempore. Your Honour, thank you for your professionalism. We have not always made your first year the easiest, but you have handled the situations well. We appreciate that. We appreciate your impartiality and the work that you do. I commit myself, at least, to trying to make your life a little easier. If I don't, you can chastise me on the airplane ride home. We share that many times. It's indeed a pleasure to work with you.

To the Senate leaders — Senator Gold, Senator Saint-Germain, Senator Tannas and Senator Cordy — we don't always agree, but we actually have good leadership meetings, and I enjoy them.

As we look forward to next year, I want to commit myself, at least, to starting over and to possibly turning over a new leaf. I assure you it will not always be easy. I also want to be careful that I don't go too far with turning that leaf, because I will remain what I always have been: a dedicated, passionate and strong believer in what we do and what our party does. At the same time, I want to respect what others do.

Colleagues, I wish you all a wonderful holiday. Merry Christmas. Happy Hanukkah. Be safe.

I look forward to seeing you again. I know the adjournment motion hasn't come yet, but it better be February 6, and I look forward to that.

Thank you very much, colleagues.

Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain: Your Honour and honourable senators, I want to thank you. I know that you are all here because you want to listen to my end-of-the-year speech. It's much appreciated. Thank you.

[Translation]

Colleagues, I will be brief, you'll see. After these long, full weeks, I certainly don't want to delay the moment when we reunite with our families and loved ones to spend a well-deserved holiday season with them.

I'd like to thank those who ensure that the Senate of Canada runs smoothly. My colleagues Senator Gold and Senator Plett did so in great detail. I thank each and every one of you. To the staff members in senators' offices and the Senate Administration, you also deserve this break. You're essential to the smooth operation of Parliament's upper chamber. I wish you very happy holidays.

• (1130)

[English]

Colleagues, we have spent long hours together over the last few weeks. The climate was sometimes good-natured and sometimes more tense. Despite tensions, disagreements and conflicting perspectives, we must never forget that it is a privilege to be here, working together for the benefit of all Canadians, never mind our caucus or group affiliation.

[Senator Plett]

I give special thanks to my colleagues Bernadette Clement, Chantal Petitclerc and David Arnot, who are so dedicated to supporting our Independent Senators Group, or ISG, colleagues and working constructively alongside their counterparts in all other groups and caucuses. All my appreciation and thanks to my ISG colleagues for their great service and dedication to this institution.

During the upcoming weeks when we will be far apart, I know we will miss each other, but that will only give us a good reason to be eager to come back in 2024. In the name of all members of the Independent Senators Group, all the best for this well-deserved holiday period. Come back rested and ready. We have a lot of work still ahead for us in 2024. Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. Scott Tannas: Honourable senators, as we wrap up another year, I join my fellow leaders in expressing my good wishes for the holiday season. For the Senate and for Canadians, 2023 has been an interesting year. Let me highlight a few items: Canada officially crowned its new king. We held high hopes for the Canadian women's soccer team at the World Cup. Canadians flocked to the movies to see *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*. Who would have believed that we would be mentioning those two names in the same sentence?

Most Canadians would never have believed that the Senate would have been at the centre of a policy review of the internet. We heard Senators use words like "YouTuber," "content creators," "algorithms," "analytics" and "online communities." The Senate took on Bill C-11 and Bill C-18 and never looked back. Whether or not you agree with the legislation, the Senate did its job very well in studying, reviewing and debating those proposed bills.

Our committees also did themselves proud with some outstanding studies on racism, our Foreign Service, suicide prevention and Indigenous communities. This is a testament and, hopefully, a return to more of that good work we do in committees on behalf of Canadians.

Over the last year, we saw some new faces arrive here and some not-so-new faces depart. We still mourn the loss of our colleague Senator Shugart.

We saw the departure of our Speaker George Furey; however, just like when winter turns to spring, a parting brings an arrival, and we welcomed our new Speaker, Raymonde Gagné, to the big chair.

In our Canadian Senators Group, or CSG, family, we welcomed some new members and experienced change in our leadership team. Personally, I am pleased to work alongside Senator Rebecca Patterson, who is affectionately referred to as "P2," but only until December 30. I am also appreciative for working with Senator Percy Downe and Senator Gigi Osler and Senator Stephen Greene. I would like to thank "P1," — Senator Dennis Patterson — and Senator Rob Black for their contribution as past members of our leadership. I offer my best wishes to my fellow leaders. At times, our meetings have been quite tense, but it is a sign of the level of commitment that each of us has to our roles. We all have jobs to do. We are accountable to our groups,

but without the willingness to listen, care and at times compromise, we could not fulfill our duties on behalf of Canadians.

On a personal note, the last few weeks have been difficult for me. I have appreciated your cards, letters and kind words of encouragement. I, like so many others, had the opportunity to feel support and great warmth from you in these times. It has shown me that regardless of our political differences, the Senate is indeed a family. We do care for one another — some may say it is a dysfunctional family from time to time, but it is a family nonetheless. I wish all of you the best for a peaceful, happy and restful time with your families.

Finally, I express my sincere best wishes to all staff in the Senate Administration, in senators' offices, in security, in broadcasting and interpretation, those who support us in the chamber and committees and all others who help us do our work here. On behalf of all of us in the Canadian Senators Group, Merry Christmas and happy holidays.

Hon. Jane Cordy: Honourable senators, the end is in sight. We had long days and very long nights, but we're here this morning.

Your Honour, are you allowed to yell "yahoo" in the chamber? I am not sure. That is how we are all feeling, I think.

I'm pleased to join with the other leaders to add my own well wishes on behalf of the Progressive Senate Group, or PSG.

Honourable senators, we have accomplished a lot in 2023 in our work to help Canadians. It has been noted before, but I think it is important to underline it again: We may not always agree on what's best when it comes to policy and legislation, but I would suggest that it is our differences that are crucial to us doing our best work. This chamber is a place where we represent our regions. As we have certainly seen recently, they are as distinct and different as each of us. We also bring a voice to those groups who are too often under-represented but whose interests must be taken into account for us to have done our jobs.

These are not easy tasks, honourable senators, as we very well know. However, I remain proud to sit in this chamber and grateful for the wise counsel of my PSG colleagues and our staff.

I love to work with you each and every day. You are incredible, hard-working senators, but you also love having fun — as we saw last night. I love you all.

Thanks to our leadership team: Senator Dalphond, my wise counsel who sits beside me; Senator Thomas Bernard; and, of course, our caucus chair, Senator Francis. You are a joy to work with.

We are so well served by the staff, both with us here in this chamber and the larger Senate family that we can't always see behind the scenes. The other day, I went for breakfast in the hotel, and as I got off the elevator, this woman said to me, "Well, hello, Senator Cordy. How are you?" I said, "Have we met before?" She said, "I am one of the translators. I know you well. As soon as I heard you speaking, I knew who you were." There are a lot of people we can't see, but they know us. So to all of

you whom we can't see, I wish you a special Christmas season. I hope each and every one of you is able to take some time over the holidays to rest and recharge. Thank you for all that you do to help this place run as well as it does. And to the staff: You are our unsung heroes.

Honourable senators, it is my sincere hope that you too are able to take some time this holiday season to slow down, reflect on the year and consider how we can do even better in 2024. I'm looking forward to spending some much-needed time with my family and friends, and I wish the same for you.

We have certainly had some, well, let's say interesting days here, especially of late, but I hope that by taking a step back, reconnecting with those we care about and reflecting on our accomplishments, we can agree that each of us is ultimately here for the same reason — we all passionately care about a variety of issues, often with contradictory views, just like the Canadians we represent from coast to coast to coast.

Within our small but mighty Progressive Senate Group, we have many shared values, but that doesn't mean we never disagree. Listening to opposing viewpoints, keeping an open mind to unfamiliar ideas and committing to doing our best for Canadians is how we move forward. It can feel frustrating when things we worked so hard on are not easy to achieve. That shouldn't stop us from continuing to do what we are all here to do — raise the issues that are important to our communities and engage in meaningful and respectful debate.

• (1140)

To all the leaders — Senators Gold, Plett, Saint-Germain and Tannas — thank you for your friendship and for the work you do. We argue behind the scenes. We may get impatient with one another, but we are able to move on. Differences make the Senate better.

Your Honour, I am sure at times it felt like a long year for you, but you have done an exceptional job.

Honourable senators, on behalf of the Progressive Senate Group, including our PSG staff, I wish you all a restful break. I look forward to working with you in the new year. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, since it is almost time for the winter break, I'd like to take this opportunity to offer my best wishes and sincere thanks to all senators, their staff and the great team at the Senate of Canada who support our work.

Within this institution, dedicated staff work tirelessly, often behind the scenes, as many of you have already mentioned. The goal of their quiet, unassuming work is always to make it easier for us to do our job and fulfill our mandate to serve Canadians.

[English]

I know that senators will agree with me when I say how much we appreciate and value the remarkable staff of the Senate in every office and across every directorate and, of course, our great Senate family, which includes all our parliamentary partners.

Thank you for your adaptability, devotion to our work and the unparalleled professionalism you demonstrate on every occasion. I am very proud of the work we accomplish together. I thank you most sincerely for your continued dedication, expertise and unwavering commitment to achieving excellence.

I wish you all happy holidays and a new year filled with joy, health and happiness.

[Translation]

I wish you happy holidays and a new year filled with joy, health and happiness. I also want to echo what our colleague Senator Dupuis said, and that is to please breathe.

Thank you.

[English]

Thank you, *meegwetch*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

The Hon. the Speaker: The Senate has completed business for the day.

Pursuant to rule 16-1(5)(a), the sitting will be suspended until 3:15 p.m. The bells will start ringing at 3 p.m.

Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, that the Senate do now adjourn during pleasure to await the arrival of His Excellency the Deputy of the Governor General?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

• (1600)

[Translation]

ROYAL ASSENT

The Right Honourable Deputy of Her Excellency the Governor General having come and being seated at the foot of the Throne, and the House of Commons having been summoned, and being come with their Speaker, the Right Honourable Deputy of Her Excellency the Governor General was pleased to give the Royal Assent to the following bills:

[The Hon. the Speaker]

An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act (*Bill C-56, Chapter 31, 2023*)

An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms) (*Bill C-21, Chapter 32, 2023*)

The Honourable Greg Fergus, Speaker of the House of Commons then addressed the Right Honourable Deputy of Her Excellency the Governor General as follows:

May it Please Your Honour:

The Commons of Canada have voted certain supplies required to enable the Government to defray the expenses of the public service.

In the name of the Commons, I present to Your Honour the following bill:

An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024 (*Bill C-60, Chapter 33, 2023*)

To which bill I humbly request Your Honour's assent.

The Right Honourable Deputy of Her Excellency the Governor General was pleased to give the Royal Assent to the said bill.

The Commons withdrew.

The Right Honourable Deputy of Her Excellency the Governor General was pleased to retire.

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

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

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 2 p.m.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

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

(At 4:08 p.m., pursuant to rule 3-4, the Senate adjourned until Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 2 p.m.)

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