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The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

CONTENTS

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

THE HONOURABLE PERCY MOCKLER

Hon. Joan M. Kingston: Honourable senators, I am pleased to rise and pay tribute to one of New Brunswick's best-known citizens, a man who has always had a passion for helping New Brunswickers.

Although I have only recently joined the Senate, I have known Senator Mockler since his time as a member of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick and as a cabinet minister who held a variety of key cabinet posts.

Percy was well known in political circles. When you mention the name "Percy," everyone knows who you mean. His name recognition is right up there with Sting and Bono.

In the New Brunswick legislature, Percy loved to pontificate, and he could do so for hours at a time. Like a poker player, he always had a tell that you could spot before he launched into a fiery, passionate oratory on the topic of the day. He would have a fresh glass of water on his desk. He would loosen his tie and clear his throat, and then cast his eyes to the other side of the chamber so as to let his legislative opponents know that they should settle down and settle in. It was a clear signal that Percy was ready to roll. He was an effective debater with a legendary quick wit. Those who tried to best him in debate soon realized that they had their hands full.

Despite his deep commitment to the Progressive Conservative Party, Percy had a great affection for all members of the Legislative Assembly, regardless of their political affiliation. He admired the role that all elected members played in representing their constituents and their province. He treated everyone with respect.

Percy Mockler had friends on both sides of the house. Although he might skewer someone during a debate, it would not be unusual to see him joking and laughing with that same member when the house rose for the day.

He was a consummate constituency politician who cared deeply for his people and worked tirelessly on their behalf. He has a special passion for those in need and has always tried to do what he could to improve their lives.

Percy loved politics, and he always will. He was a political strategist and Conservative organizer, bar none. He carried at least three phones and was always taking calls. He even had one that he kept in his cowboy boot. He knew the importance of getting back to people on all three phones. This was an example that he imparted to others.

A lesser-known fact about Percy is that, as a proud young graduate of Université de Moncton, he was the quality control manager at the Bricklin plant, a job that might be right up there with being a tour guide on the *Titanic*.

In all seriousness, like many New Brunswickers, Percy wanted the Bricklin venture to succeed and pave the way to economic prosperity in New Brunswick. He remains a proud owner of a Bricklin automobile built at that plant.

I know that he brought the same passion that guided him through his career to the chamber, and the Senate has been well served by Percy Mockler. He was one of the first people to welcome me and to provide sage advice, and it was greatly appreciated.

Percy is both a gentleman and a gentle man. I want to join all of my colleagues in giving him my best wishes, and I hope that he enjoys a well-deserved retirement.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, my friend.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

THE LATE HONOURABLE ROLAND ROY MCMURTRY, O.C.

Hon. Gwen Boniface: Honourable senators, I rise today to honour the life of a former attorney general, High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and Chief Justice of Ontario. Roy McMurtry passed away in March at the age of 91.

Mr. McMurtry had a tremendous impact on the fabric of social justice and human rights in Canada. As Attorney General, he led the charge to bring bilingualism to Ontario's court system.

During his time as a justice of the Court of Appeal, he upheld the decision that the common-law definition of marriage was in violation of the Charter. This led to the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada.

Mr. McMurtry worked to improve gender and racial balance in Ontario's courts. He made historic appointments, including Justice George Carter, the first Canadian-born Black judge.

In 1976, he appointed Rosalie Abella, who, at the time, was 29 years old and expecting a child. Madam Justice Abella became the first Jewish woman to sit on the Supreme Court of Canada.

Roy McMurtry's admirable legacy includes his pivotal role in negotiating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and patriating Canada's Constitution.

My path crossed with Mr. McMurtry's on many occasions — he, as Ontario's Chief Justice — and during my time as Commissioner of the OPP.

I will always fondly remember, though, an exchange I had with him when I was a very young police constable. Mr. McMurtry had threats against his life when he was Attorney General. I was one of the many officers assigned to his security detail at his Toronto residence.

I was completing my degree part time, and the midnight shift was the perfect time to write some papers. Mr. McMurtry always took an interest in my studies. One evening, we had a conversation about youth justice. Several nights later, he came home and gave me a report which, as he described, was “fresh off the press.” He said he hoped it would help me with my paper. This story reflects how many people have described Roy McMurtry: as someone who had a passion for justice, youth, and always took time to engage and share his knowledge.

For many years after, I and the other officers involved on that detail received a Christmas greeting from Mr. McMurtry, which always had one of his paintings on the card.

Colleagues, Canada has lost a great Ontarian and a great Canadian. I ask you to join me in extending condolences to the family of Roy McMurtry.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, scientist, conservationist and United Nations Messenger of Peace. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Klyne.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

JANE GOODALL, DBE

Hon. Marty Klyne: Honourable senators, I rise to pay tribute to the esteemed Dr. Jane Goodall, who has honoured the Senate and our country with her visit here today.

As you know, and as Her Honour just acknowledged, Dr. Goodall is a world-renowned primatologist, conservationist and United Nations Messenger of Peace. She is also the founder of the Jane Goodall Institute, a leading organization working around the world to save wildlife.

• (1410)

Dr. Goodall's legendary discoveries about our closest living relatives — chimpanzees — have revolutionized humanity's understanding of our relationship with animals. Dr. Goodall used science to prove what many Indigenous peoples have always known: We are not separate from our fellow creatures, but connected to them.

In short, Dr. Goodall's discoveries sparked a revolution of empathy. Her life has been devoted to protecting nature. Her message has never been more urgent when it comes to addressing the climate crisis, biodiversity and animal welfare. These are shared priorities for the Honourable Murray Sinclair and me, and I hope for you as well. I have a message to share from Senator Sinclair:

Senators, I regret being unable to join you in hosting the esteemed Dr. Jane Goodall at the Senate, a place which I have thought of as Canada's council of elders.

Dr. Goodall is truly an elder of our global society, and a hero who inspires us to do better by all creatures of creation with whom we share this earth. I trust you will take to heart her wisdom that we must act now to protect the natural world, a necessity according to both science and Indigenous knowledge.

Dr. Goodall, you have done extensive fieldwork and research with chimpanzees, who form political alliances to achieve their goals. This is excellent preparation for your visit to Parliament. Thank you for your unceasing efforts to protect wildlife, including your conservation initiatives with Indigenous partners in Africa. You are a source of endless hope to people — especially youth — working to save our beautiful planet, and the sacred and innocent animals who deserve our compassion. We will never give up.

Senators, I trust we will transform inspiration into concrete actions to protect the natural world. In honour of Dr. Goodall, and out of respect for all our relations, I trust that we will jointly answer this call.

Thank you. *Hiy kitatamihin.*

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Matilda Kim, Eric Choi and Alex Choi. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Martin.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

AMBROSE MATILDA MUSIC CONNECTION

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to celebrate the extraordinary power of music — a force that has the remarkable ability to unite people from all walks of life and to make a positive impact on the world around us. Music can serve as a powerful tool for organizations wanting to bring people together and help raise funds for charitable causes.

One such organization celebrating its tenth anniversary is the Ambrose Matilda Music Connection, or AMMC. AMMC was established in 2014 with the intent of providing financial support to community organizations and charities through benefit concerts, as well as creating opportunities for young musicians to showcase their talents.

The founders of AMMC — Matilda Min Jeong Kim and the late Ambrose Wonchul Choi — were strong believers that music eliminates boundaries and brings people together, and, over the past decade, all proceeds from the benefit concerts have been donated to various charities in Vancouver.

During the pandemic, AMMC recognized that many young musicians were facing financial hardship, and that vulnerable and isolated people sought connection and community. AMMC has held concerts for people with limited mobility, for people in hospitals and care homes and for those requiring music for funeral services. The AM International Music Competition, now in its fourth year, was first created to support young aspiring musicians.

AMMC's concerts and efforts over the past decade have demonstrated the power of music to inspire hope and resilience in times of adversity.

Like AMMC and its dedicated board and volunteers, let us continue to support musicians, artists and organizations that use their talents for the betterment of society, and let us never underestimate the profound impact that a simple song or a heartfelt performance can have on someone's life.

Honourable senators, please join me in congratulating AMMC on their tenth anniversary and celebrating the transformative power of music.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of André Lewis, Artistic Director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, accompanied by colleagues from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Osler.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

ANDRÉ LEWIS, O.M.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Colleagues, today I rise to talk about the amazing André Lewis.

[*English*]

He is the Artistic Director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and next year, he will celebrate his fiftieth and final year with the company.

[Senator Martin]

Under his leadership, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, or RWB, has risen to become one of Canada's — and the world's — premier dance companies. In North America, the RWB is the only ballet company that has been granted a "Royal" designation. As its Artistic Director, André is well known for his ability to balance the enduring appeal of classic productions and the creation of bold new works. In fact, one of André's best-known successes is the 1999 adaptation of the *Nutcracker*. The RWB version reflects Prairie life and Canadian traditions with an emphasis on children and families, all while respecting the classic ballet.

One of his proudest moments as Artistic Director was the commission of a groundbreaking and internationally acclaimed ballet called *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation*, which examined the effects of the residential school system.

Born in Gatineau, Quebec, André began his ballet training here in Ottawa. In 1975, he was accepted into the professional division of the RWB and was promoted to soloist in 1982. He retired from dance in 1990, became the RWB's associate artistic director in 1992, and then Artistic Director in 1996. Since 2018, he has served as both Artistic Director and the Chief Executive Officer.

Throughout his career, André has been called the face, the conscience and the inspirational guide of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. He is deeply involved with community outreach programs, such as Ballet in the Park and Sharing Dance, both of which aim to bring ballet to where people are. He was also instrumental in establishing the RWB's Indigenous Advisory Circle.

He has been honoured with the Governor General's Meritorious Service Medal, the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and the Order of Manitoba, and he has been appointed as a member of the Order of Canada.

Based on everything I've just told you, you may not realize that André Lewis is a man deeply grounded in humility and grace, but his family — some of whom are here in the gallery today — knows that he is a Canadian treasure.

[*Translation*]

Caroline, Émilie and Daniel, thank you for sharing your husband and father with us.

André, thank you for everything. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Sabine Sparwasser, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Canada. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Omidvar.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

SABINE SPARWASSER

CONGRATULATIONS ON RETIREMENT

Hon. Ratna Omidvar: Honourable senators, today I rise to honour the remarkable tenure of German Ambassador to Canada, Madam Sabine Sparwasser, as she retires from her diplomatic service. Her contributions have been nothing but transformational, leaving behind a legacy of strengthened ties and deepened cooperation between our two nations.

Throughout her time as ambassador, Madam Sparwasser has played a pivotal role in enhancing the economic relationships between our two nations. Under her leadership, the level of investment between Canada and Germany has reached unprecedented heights, reflecting the robust economic partnership and mutual trust we have in each other's economies.

• (1420)

Ambassador Sparwasser also oversaw the closest cultural and social relationship between Canada and Germany in history, fostering extensive exchanges in various fields, including the arts, culture, education and innovation.

As one example, during a state visit by our Governor General to Germany, Canada showcased the rich diversity of its literature at the Frankfurt Book Fair, an event made possible through Ambassador Sparwasser's efforts.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's 2021 visit to Canada was a watershed moment in her tenure as it established a bridge across the Atlantic on hydrogen cooperation. This landmark initiative underscores our shared commitment to combatting climate change and advancing sustainable energy solutions through joint research and developmental efforts.

Also, under her watch — there are many firsts — Canada's first Inuit Governor General, Mary Simon, accompanied German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Tuktoyaktuk, showcasing the unique cultural heritage of its Indigenous communities to the President of Germany for the first time.

In our shared pursuit of these values, Canada and Germany have bolstered cooperation in defending democracy and supporting Ukraine, and Germany's embrace of Canada's progressive migration policies highlights our joint dedication to inclusion. It signifies a powerful alliance as we tackle global challenges and strive for peace and democracy together.

Please join me in expressing our heartfelt gratitude and best wishes to Ambassador Sparwasser as she concludes her distinguished service to her nation and to ours. Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Bin Chen and his associates. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Oh.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ADJOURNMENT

NOTICE OF MOTION

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

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, April 16, 2024, at 2 p.m.

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

NOTICE OF MOTION TO AUTHORIZE COMMITTEE TO STUDY GROWING ISSUE OF WILDFIRES

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

That the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry be authorized to examine and report on the growing issue of wildfires in Canada and the consequential effects that wildfires have on forestry and agriculture industries, as well as rural and Indigenous communities, throughout the country;

That in particular, the committee should examine:

- (a) the current status of wildfires in Canada;
- (b) the impact of wildfires on forestry, agriculture, water systems, air quality, food security, and biosecurity;
- (c) the possible federal measures that are in place, or should be in place, to adequately monitor and organize a response to wildfires;
- (d) the potential areas of improvement of these federal measures for addressing wildfires; and

- (e) international best practices as they relate to responding to wildfires;

That the committee report to the Senate no later than December 31, 2025, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report; and

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

QUESTION PERIOD

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

COST OF TRAVEL

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Gold, in August the Prime Minister's Office issued a press release saying his tour of the Indo-Pacific would reaffirm Canada's commitment to "... make life more affordable for people on both sides of the Pacific. . . ."

The *National Post* reported yesterday that the Prime Minister's six-day trip cost taxpayers around \$2 million, with \$190,000 spent on in-flight catering. There were 51 people in his delegation, leader. That works out to an average of \$3,725 per person for in-flight catering.

Senator Gold, the total price of this trip is not known, so those figures will likely go up. Why is it, Senator Gold, that every time the Prime Minister flies all over to talk about affordability it costs Canadians more and more?

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

Given the impact that world events have on us here in Canada, I think Canadians expect, and should expect, our government to be at the table for these international events, including the G20, which is a very important forum.

An Hon. Senator: What table?

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gold.

Senator Gold: Thank you, Your Honour.

Stewardship and accountability with regard to public funds are of importance to Global Affairs Canada, which assures and ensures that public funds are spent responsibly, respecting accepted practices for both international procurement and Canadian official travel abroad.

All of this is public in the Public Accounts of Canada, tabled annually in Parliament and available to all Canadians.

Senator Plett: This was absolutely not worth the cost, leader. Last fall, Minister Anand said:

It is extremely important for all of us to be very judicious about the choices we are making relating to travel . . .

Senator Gold, did she mention this to the Prime Minister? Did the minister tell the Prime Minister Canadians are using food banks in record numbers? Does he know Canadians can't afford the gas to drive to work? This Prime Minister is out of touch, and Canadians are out of money.

Senator Gold: This government is very aware of the challenges that Canadians are facing. It has and will continue to put into place concrete measures. With regard to issues of spending, I understand that the government is in the process of a spending review to refocus unnecessary spending, such as executive travel, but this trip, on behalf of the government and the people of Canada, was not unnecessary.

PUBLIC SAFETY

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): My question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate concerns the so-called safe supply of dangerous drugs. Over the course of several months, the RCMP in British Columbia has seized thousands of drugs believed to have been diverted from this so-called safe supply. A leaked memo shows the B.C. RCMP has recently been directed to send all media requests regarding hot-button issues to its central headquarters. This list of issues includes drug busts and drug decriminalization. It is believed this memo was sent to every RCMP detachment in the province.

Leader, which member of the Trudeau government issued this gag order?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): I'm not aware that any gag order was issued. The issue of the diversion of illegal drugs from programs designed to either wean people from dependency, or at least ensure that those unfortunate enough to be dependent on them have access to safer supplies, is a serious one and properly the subject of investigation by the RCMP and others.

• (1430)

Indeed, given the importance of this issue and the media attention that attaches to it, I'm not surprised that the RCMP has made a decision that it wanted to be aware of such interest so that it could be properly responded to.

Senator Martin: It's from a memo, a directive to the RCMP, and is therefore a gag order. The RCMP in my province have been ordered not to speak publicly about important public safety matters, and this is wrong. British Columbians fund these highly addictive drugs through their tax dollars. They should be able to hear from police when these drugs have been taken and resold by criminals, even if the Trudeau government finds it embarrassing.

Leader, who determined the list of topics the RCMP in British Columbia can't speak about publicly?

Senator Plett: Names, leader.

Senator Gold: The RCMP operates independently from the Government of Canada, and these are questions that should be directed to those responsible.

FINANCE

BUDGET 2024

Hon. Mary Coyle: Senator Gold, the government has been very busy making a number of announcements related to next week's budget. I have budget questions for you.

First, in a meeting of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Kate Higgins, CEO of Cooperation Canada, said:

Investing in and supporting civil society is one of the surest ways to sustain and protect economic and social development gains and secure peace and democracy.

Yesterday, I met with representatives of Cooperation Canada, whose recent report called upon the federal government to commit an additional \$3 billion over five years toward supporting women and girls in humanitarian emergencies and protracted conflicts and crises, and supporting human rights, civil society and democracy.

Senator Gold, will we see this important international assistance investment in this year's budget?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for underlining the importance of measures to assist women and girls throughout the world. In that regard, this has been a priority for this government, as we know. It was this government that launched Canada's first Feminist International Assistance Policy. I have every confidence that this government will continue to advocate for and support the interests and the rights of women and girls around the globe as part of its feminist foreign policy.

With regard to your specific question, as will be no surprise to you and other colleagues, I'm really not in a position to comment on what might or might not be in the budget. We await with eagerness next Tuesday's announcements.

CANADA DISABILITY BENEFIT

Hon. Mary Coyle: Thank you, Senator Gold.

My second question was going to be one I've asked before and which was asked by Senator Pate yesterday. It was regarding funding for the Canada disability benefit.

You said you couldn't speculate as to what might or might not be in the budget. However, Senator Gold, could you tell us if the government has secured agreements from all provinces and

territories to not claw back any of their benefits for Canadians living with disabilities when the Canada disability benefit starts to flow, hopefully this year and hopefully very soon?

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

The intent, of course, is that the Canada disability benefit will provide additional benefits, not be a substitute for existing benefits. I've been advised that the minister is working closely with his provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure that persons with disabilities will feel net positive gains from the additional financial support this will give them, which will lead to more independence for them.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Hon. Jane MacAdam: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, in January, the federal government announced that they were restricting the number of new international undergraduate students entering Canada by 35%. The number of students eligible to apply for a study permit was based on a national 60% conversion from application to acceptance, and the student quotas were to be allocated based on provincial population.

With 0.043% of the national population and a 52% conversion from application to student permit, Prince Edward Island should be receiving 3,007 new applications. Originally, P.E.I. received 2,004; recently, that number has been increased to 2,312, based on the lower conversion rate. The allocation based on population has not been addressed.

Can you please explain the apparent discrepancy between what is being allotted to P.E.I. and its relative population size?

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

We all understand that the national cap on study permit applications was designed to address the rapid increase of international students in Canada, and measures and the allocations have been communicated to provincial and territorial governments with regard to 2024.

The national cap is based on the amount of expiring student permits this year. That means that the number of international students coming to Canada in 2024 should be the same as the number of students whose permits expire this year. For this year, the target is 485,000 approved study permits.

My understanding, senator, is that the distribution of the study permits is based upon the population share of each province and territory. Inevitably, under this model, some territories and provinces will get more students than last year, while others will find fewer students approved.

Senator MacAdam: Thank you, Senator Gold.

The presidents of both the University of Prince Edward Island and Holland College estimate that this cap will lead to a decline of 30% in first-year international student enrolments. That is significantly more than what the federal government had projected. This decline will have significant community impacts, including upon programming and tuition fees, and will be felt substantially in future years.

How will the impacts of the cap be evaluated to ensure that the changes are not disproportionately impacting smaller provinces?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question.

In the limited time I have, I know that measures are in place to limit both the upside advantage for provinces receiving more and the downside disadvantage for provinces receiving fewer, regardless of their size.

The government will continue to work collaboratively with provinces and territories, both to strengthen this program and to mitigate the immediate impacts of whatever changes might flow from the caps.

NATIONAL FINANCE

BUSINESS OF THE COMMITTEE

Hon. Scott Tannas: My question is for the very capable, hugely popular, much beloved, handsome chair of the National Finance Committee, Senator Mockler.

On February 6, 2024, the Senate requested the committee to conduct a study into the government practice of including non-financial matters in bills implementing provisions of budgets and economic statements. I understand the committee has not yet held a hearing on this order of reference.

Senator Mockler, can you please advise the Senate if the committee has adopted a work plan and determined when it will commence its study?

Hon. Percy Mockler: Thank you very much, Senator Tannas.

To answer the question directly, the Senate National Finance Committee, on February 6, 2024, was in the process of planning the beginning of their study on the matter of Bill C-59, the Fall Economic Statement and Supplementary Estimates (C). Senator Tannas — through the chair, Your Honour — I fully acknowledge the importance of the study you are referring to. However, I am certain that the new chair of the committee, along with the other members of the steering committee, will discuss this matter as soon as possible.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

CONFLICT IN GAZA STRIP

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, we are witnessing the ongoing violence against Palestinians. This is not about self-defence; innocent men, women and children in Gaza are being killed. People are dying of starvation and dehydration. The Israeli military have bombed and raided hospitals. Adequate food and medical supplies are not being allowed to enter that region. Many countries, including South Africa, have called for the end of violence.

Senator Gold, what will Canada do to ensure that we do not allow another genocide to occur on our watch?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Canada's position regarding this dispute and war between Israel and Hamas, and on the devastating impact on innocent civilians in Gaza, is well known, public and appropriate: The loss of innocent life, regardless of where they are from or who they are, is a tragedy to be deplored.

• (1440)

It is not the case that no aid is getting through, though more aid is needed. Canada will continue to work with its democratic allies and the international community to use its influence in the hope of bringing this tragic conflict to a just and appropriate end.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

CARBON TAX

Hon. Leo Housakos: Senator Gold, after eight-plus years of the Trudeau government, life has become unaffordable for Canadians. Instead of providing Canadians with some relief, and despite 70% of premiers asking Justin Trudeau to spike the hike, he continues to make things worse by hiking the carbon tax yet again on April 1 by a whopping 23%. This is just one step in Justin Trudeau's plan to make everything more expensive by quadrupling the carbon tax over the next six years.

Pierre Poilievre has written to Justin Trudeau asking him to call an emergency meeting of all first ministers to discuss alternatives to this cruel carbon tax. The premiers of Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta have also written to Trudeau asking him to call an emergency meeting.

Senator Gold, why won't Justin Trudeau meet with the premiers? What is he afraid of?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The government does not accept many of the premises of your question, but I will address the heart of your question.

It is a joint responsibility not only of all governments — federal, provincial and territorial — but of all citizens to do their part to fight climate change. We heard just recently the importance of a study that one of our committees will be doing on wildfires and their impact. We all live in communities where the ravages of climate change — like flooding — are devastating to our economy, to our well-being and, indeed, to the lives of our citizens.

It is a joint responsibility that some provinces are simply neglecting and other politicians are simply exploiting. This government is willing to work with each and every province and territory in a good faith effort to find consensual solutions to this existential crisis.

Senator Housakos: Senator Gold, the last time Justin Trudeau met with the premiers to discuss carbon tax was several years ago. Can you name one of those premiers who is still in office today? Name me one. You can't because there are none. That's okay because common sense Conservatives will work with premiers to lower the cost of living for Canadians.

My question is the following: Why is it that the Prime Minister thinks that he knows better than all Canadians and all premiers? If you really want to work in good faith, how could you work in good faith if you don't sit down with the premiers to have a good faith discussion?

Senator Gold: It is simply untrue to characterize that the Prime Minister thinks he's smarter than everyone else. He doesn't think he's smarter than the 200 economists who have underlined the importance of — and none of us would claim to be smarter than the 200 economists from all stripes, ideological and otherwise, who see the carbon price on pollution as the central, most important — Conservative-supported, back in the day — measure to fight climate change.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Leader, Global News reports a man now living in Winnipeg taught for many years at Beijing's military academy for cyber and electronic warfare. The Canada Border Services Agency said this man's work supported an organization responsible for numerous instances of espionage against Canada. Yet somehow, leader, he managed to obtain permanent residence here three years ago. Leader, a permanent resident is inadmissible to Canada on security grounds for engaging in an act of espionage that is against Canada and our country's interests.

I have two questions, Senator Gold. Please answer them. Why was this man allowed to obtain a permanent resident visa? And what is the government doing about this?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): I don't know the answer to the first one. It's an individual case, the details of which I'm not aware. Nor am I aware of what measures may be taken if, in fact, the allegations which you've referred to have been substantiated.

Senator Plett: You're questioning whether they are? Journalist Terry Glavin recently said:

Every shocking thing we heard this week at the Hogue inquiry Trudeau knew nearly five years ago. CSIS told him. He said nothing. He did nothing.

He refuses to answer, even now.

As do you. Leader, do you commit to providing an answer — a real answer — and tell us how this man in Winnipeg could have received a permanent resident visa? Or is this going to be swept under the rug as well?

Senator Gold: Senator, thank you for your question. Notwithstanding the statements of the journalist, both officials who have testified before the inquiry and the Prime Minister who will be testifying later today are in the best position to answer that. My understanding is that it has already been stated by officials — and the Prime Minister will have an opportunity to respond to — whether some of those allegations are, in fact, correct.

QUEBEC'S JURISDICTION ON IMMIGRATION

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Senator Gold, the Government of Quebec wants to reduce immigration in the province and is calling on Ottawa to give them more powers. The premier claims the current situation is unsustainable and untenable. However, just last month, federal immigration minister Marc Miller informed his provincial counterpart that he directed his department to process requests for permanent residency in the Family Reunification Program beyond the ceiling set by the province. As a result, the Premier of Quebec floated the idea of holding a referendum on immigration if his demands are not met by the end of June.

Senator Gold, what is the government's reaction to Premier Legault's latest outburst? Can you reassure those family members that desperately want to be reunited with their loved ones that Canada will hold steady?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, senator. Colleagues, family reunification has always been one of the government's top priorities in the context of our immigration program.

For too long, family reunification applications in Quebec have had much longer wait times than those for the rest of the country. Why is this? It's because Quebec has issued more Quebec Selection Certificates, or CSQs, for more applications than it wishes to admit within its levels of immigration.

Therefore, to harmonize processing times and reunite families more quickly, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, now finalizes family-class applications for Quebec applicants with valid CSQs. If Quebec wishes the IRCC to not process certain family class permanent residence applications, it can simply, in its jurisdiction, stop issuing CSQs. This constitutes an authorization for IRCC to proceed with processing. This was not taken lightly, but the government has a moral obligation to help families reunite.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that response. Quebec claims that Ottawa's directive for permanent residency in the Family Reunification Program is a direct affront to Quebec's jurisdiction. The premier argues that Quebec alone determines its permanent immigration targets.

Senator Gold, what is the government's position on that matter? Does the federal government have the legal authority to override the province's threshold?

Senator Gold: Thank you. Under the Canada-Québec Accord, Canada sets its annual immigration levels respecting the number of permanent residents that Quebec wishes to welcome. However, by issuing CSQs, Quebec is authorizing the federal government to process these files. In no way is the government going against Quebec's wishes or trespassing on their jurisdiction since Quebec has already selected the people they want by submitting them a Quebec Selection Certificate. It is the responsibility of Quebec to solve this problem — not Canada — to not impede family reunification.

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Paula Simons: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Last summer, the northern Alberta community of Fox Lake on the Little Red River Cree Nation was devastated by a wildfire that left more than a thousand people displaced and homeless. The First Nations' plans to bring in rebuilding supplies over ice bridges this winter were thwarted first by warm weather and then by warm water when a BC Hydro dam repeatedly released warm water and flooded out the ice bridges.

Now the First Nation and the community are imploring the federal government to work with the province to fund and build a permanent bridge. Can you tell us if and when the government will step up to get that bridge built?

• (1450)

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you. I'm not in a position to respond to the specifics about the bridge. However, I can tell you that the government understands very well how shortening winters and climate change have had a devastating impact on many communities, especially in remote communities and First Nations communities, among others. The government will do what it can to ensure that the delivery of essential supplies is continued and uninterrupted to those communities who are impacted — as this is — by the inability to be properly connected to other communities and receive their supplies.

My understanding is that Indigenous Services Canada meets regularly with such communities to discuss both immediate and longer-term options, and has, indeed, invited provincial governments to participate in this as well.

Senator Simons: Fox Lake is also dependent on two barges to bring in food, fuel, supplies and workers across the river this summer. Just recently, Transport Canada has banned all federal employees, including members of the RCMP, from riding on the barges until the reserve gets them federally certified — which is a difficult and expensive process, given the access problems that I outlined.

Can you please tell me what steps the government may take to help the First Nation meet those conditions?

Senator Gold: Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Senator Simons. I don't have the answer to that, but I'll certainly raise it with the minister at the earliest convenience.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

USE OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Hon. Robert Black: Senator Gold, as you know, I have an inquiry in the chamber regarding land use planning as it relates to food security. With the Prime Minister's announcement on April 2 — regarding changes to cutting red tape to fast-track home construction and build more infrastructure — I continue to worry about farmland. While I'm also concerned about Canada's housing crisis and the future of home ownership for our younger generations, the rezoning and sale of our prime agricultural land threatens to not only jeopardize the livelihood of its owners — our farmers, who are the very backbone of our country — but also simultaneously threaten food security in the community and across Canada.

Considering the importance of preserving valuable agricultural land for food security and environmental sustainability, how does the government intend to collaborate with provincial and municipal authorities to ensure that land use decisions align with long-term strategies for maintaining prime farmland and supporting the growth of the agricultural sector?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. It's a good question.

Indeed, as we know, the federal government is working with a number of municipalities to accelerate the building of housing for those who are seeking it, and it is taking a leadership role in that regard. It is also prepared to work with and provide support to the provinces that are willing to work with the federal government in this regard — recognizing that land use planning is a provincial responsibility.

I'm not aware of any specific provisions in any of these discussions that relate to your question. However, it is worth noting the focus — at least to date — with regard to municipalities: Within municipalities, it's the building of fourplexes and things like that, which, to my relatively uneducated — but not completely uneducated — mind, probably has less of an impact on agricultural land than other developments that could be forthcoming.

Senator Black: Thank you, Senator Gold.

Given the interconnected nature of food security, land preservation and sustainable agricultural practices, could you provide insights into any ongoing initiatives or plans by your government to promote responsible land use, protect our prime agricultural lands and enhance collaboration between all levels of government and stakeholders in addressing these challenges in this country?

Senator Gold: Thank you. There are a number of federal-provincial cost-sharing programs to address these issues. I can't list all of them. Let me simply highlight the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, or Sustainable CAP. It's a \$3.5-billion, five-year agreement between the federal, provincial and territorial governments to do a number of things to strengthen the competitiveness, innovation and resiliency of the agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector. This will support agricultural producers and fund the maintenance and provision of healthy soils, water resources and all that we need for a healthy environment.

HEALTH

AUTISM STRATEGY

Hon. Leo Housakos: Senator Gold, April is World Autism Month in Canada, and we have the Autism Alliance of Canada stakeholders from across the country coming to Ottawa for a conference next week. These are people who are desperate, and they need hope. They're very concerned that Bill S-203 — which was passed unanimously by this chamber and the House — has not been moved forward by this government. One of the requests was that, within 12 months, they hold a national conference. The government has not done that yet. They've been waiting eight years now for a national strategy on autism. Nothing of any substance has come out so far.

Of course, next week we have the budget. They're hopeful that despite the failures in terms of a national autism strategy, as well as the lack of a national framework from the government, something tangible will come out in the budget next week. They're concerned because, again, we've seen the government, over the last few days, roll out a number of issues that are important to them, and autism seems to be glaringly absent.

Can you shed some light on that, Senator Gold?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you. I don't have much light to shed, but I do want to congratulate you and others in this chamber, and our past colleagues, for your advocacy in bringing this important issue forward. It touches many of us and our families, friends and communities.

I'm going to raise this with the minister to find out the status of the commitments that were embodied in the bill to which you refer. I'd be happy to do so.

Once again, I congratulate you, and encourage all of us in this chamber to take advantage of the presence and events that are surrounding us here in Ottawa.

Senator Housakos: All those words are comforting, Senator Gold, but we have to do more than that when the stakeholders show up in Ottawa next week. It's been years of navel-gazing and aspirational responses to their problems. We passed the piece of legislation, which we did collectively. We all deserve the credit. But it's only effective if the government respects the wishes of that legislation.

Therefore, I think it's not time to inquire. I think it's time to send a message to the government that when we do certain pieces of legislation on behalf of citizens, the government must respect it — like Bill S-203. I hope that message will be conveyed to the government in a strong fashion.

Senator Gold: I will certainly undertake to do that.

[Translation]

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THE LATE RIGHT HONOURABLE BRIAN MULRONEY, P.C., C.C., G.O.Q.

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne rose pursuant to notice of Senator LaBoucane-Benson on March 19, 2024:

That she will call the attention of the Senate to the life of the late Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, P.C.

She said: Honourable senators, I know that I'm very late in doing so, but I would still like to briefly pay tribute to the late Brian Mulroney, a consequential prime minister. As a parliamentary correspondent, I covered his last years in office, from 1989 to 1993. Those were not easy years. Above all, I am still very grateful for his persistent attempts to convince the English-speaking provinces that Quebec was a distinct society and should be recognized as such, even though his efforts were in vain. To me, his dogged determination on this issue was admirable, though it cost him in the polls. In his memory, I want to reiterate that Quebec is and will remain a distinct society.

With hindsight, Brian Mulroney's legacy is undeniable, but at the time, I was 30 years old and a bold and insolent young journalist. Brian Mulroney was not very happy with me when I did a somewhat biased story contrasting a shot of champagne flowing freely at a Conservative event with a shot of the homeless people outside. The Prime Minister, who was a stickler for decorum, also got quite irritated with me in Kennebunkport when I began asking a question in French before President Bush had finished his answer. Oh boy! However, this Prime Minister also wanted to be liked and to charm those around him to the very end.

• (1500)

In June 1993, when he drove his Jeep up to Rideau Hall to formally hand in his resignation, I asked him if he had a valid driver's licence, seeing as he had had a chauffeur at his disposal for nine years. He laughed and showed me his licence, saying he'd brought it along just for my sake.

I'm not the only member of my family to have known and admired Mr. Mulroney. My husband, Marc Gilbert, produced the TVA documentary that was broadcast to coincide with the release of his memoir in 2007. Shooting in Baie-Comeau was a memorable experience. Clearly happy to be there, Brian Mulroney sat down right on La Salle Boulevard for the first interview, but people walking or driving by kept interrupting to say hello to the former prime minister and member of Parliament.

The striking thing about the man known here as "the boy from Baie-Comeau" was that he remembered the names of everyone who came up to him. He was quick to shake their hand and ask how they or their family members were doing. He had once rubbed elbows with the high and mighty, but he was happy being back home in the small town where he had grown up, between francophones and anglophones, Catholics and Protestants.

For example, he recounted how, when he was a boy, his mother would send him to the paper mill every Friday to pick up his father's pay. In those days, women weren't allowed inside the mill, and wages were paid in cash. Once his mother had the money, she could go and buy groceries and, according to her son Brian, Friday night was the only night he could be sure of getting meat to eat.

I have one last anecdote to share. In his late teens, he spent an entire summer loading sacks of grain onto boats owned by Cargill, which used Baie-Comeau's deepwater port to ship Western Canadian wheat to Europe. It was back-breaking work, since each sack of wheat weighed a hundred pounds and he had

to carry them on his back. As Mr. Mulroney explained, that's where he developed his respect for manual labourers, for those who didn't get to choose their job and had to earn their living from their own labour.

I know Mr. Mulroney talked a lot about his humble origins, but it's essential to be aware of them in order to understand the politician he became, the man who left his mark on our history.

May his soul rest in peace.

(On motion of Senator LaBoucane-Benson, debate adjourned.)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

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

That the Senate do now adjourn.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(*At 3:04 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.*)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

	PAGE		PAGE		
SENATORS' STATEMENTS					
The Honourable Percy Mockler					
Hon. Joan M. Kingston	5880	Public Safety			
The Late Honourable Roland Roy McMurtry, O.C.					
Hon. Gwen Boniface	5880	Royal Canadian Mounted Police			
Visitor in the Gallery					
The Hon. the Speaker	5881	Hon. Yonah Martin	5884		
Jane Goodall, DBE					
Hon. Marty Klyne	5881	Hon. Marc Gold	5884		
Visitors in the Gallery					
The Hon. the Speaker	5881	Finance			
Ambrose Matilda Music Connection					
Hon. Yonah Martin	5881	Budget 2024			
Visitors in the Gallery					
The Hon. the Speaker	5882	Hon. Mary Coyle	5885		
André Lewis, O.M.					
Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler	5882	Hon. Marc Gold	5885		
Visitor in the Gallery					
The Hon. the Speaker	5882	Canada Disability Benefit			
Sabine Sparwasser					
Congratulations on Retirement		Hon. Mary Coyle	5885		
Hon. Ratna Omidvar	5883	Hon. Marc Gold	5885		
Visitors in the Gallery					
The Hon. the Speaker	5883	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship			
ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS					
Adjournment					
Notice of Motion		International Students			
Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson	5883	Hon. Jane MacAdam	5885		
Agriculture and Forestry				Hon. Marc Gold	5885
Notice of Motion to Authorize Committee to Study Growing		National Finance			
Issue of Wildfires		Business of the Committee			
Hon. Robert Black	5883	Hon. Scott Tannas	5886		
QUESTION PERIOD				Hon. Percy Mockler	5886
Prime Minister's Office				Global Affairs	
Cost of Travel		Conflict in Gaza Strip			
Hon. Donald Neil Plett	5884	Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard	5886		
Hon. Marc Gold	5884	Hon. Marc Gold	5886		
Environment and Climate Change				Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
				Permanent Resident Status	
				Hon. Donald Neil Plett	5887
				Hon. Marc Gold	5887
				Quebec's Jurisdiction on Immigration	
				Hon. Tony Loffreda	5887
				Hon. Marc Gold	5887
				Indigenous Services	
				Infrastructure	
				Hon. Paula Simons	5888
				Hon. Marc Gold	5888
				Agriculture and Agri-Food	
				Use of Agricultural Lands	
				Hon. Robert Black	5888
				Hon. Marc Gold	5888
				Health	
				Autism Strategy	
				Hon. Leo Housakos	5889
				Hon. Marc Gold	5889

CONTENTS

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

	PAGE		PAGE
ORDERS OF THE DAY		Business of the Senate	
The Late Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, P.C., C.C., G.O.Q.		Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson	5890
Inquiry—Debate Adjourned			
Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne	5889		