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The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, October 30, 2024

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

Prayers.

[*Translation*]

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when today's *Order Paper and Notice Paper* was initially published online, one item of Other Business, the motion for the adoption of the twentieth report of the Indigenous Peoples Committee, had been omitted. This was identified by the Chamber Operations and Procedure Office, and the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* was republished with that item appearing as Item No. 73 under Reports of Committees — Other.

The copies available in the chamber are correct, but any senator who may be working from an early online version should take note that this item may be missing from their copy.

I thank honourable senators for their understanding and assure you that steps have been taken to ensure such an issue does not repeat itself.

[*English*]

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

INDIGENOUS YOUTH LEADERS

Hon. Brian Francis: Honourable senators, it is my pleasure to welcome eight remarkable young Indigenous leaders to the Senate. They have travelled from across Turtle Island for Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders. This annual event is hosted by the Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, with support from the Communications, Broadcasting and Publications Directorate.

This week, we are hosting the eighth edition of Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders. We launched this event in 2016, and continue to host it because we want to hear from trailblazing Indigenous youth on what life is like in their communities and learn about the incredible work they are doing to inspire others.

We already heard testimonies from this year's participants at our committee meeting this morning, and we look forward to learning more at another meeting this evening. I invite you all to join us, or to tune in and listen.

I now have the honour of introducing three participants of Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders 2024.

Bradley Bacon travelled from Unamen-Shipu, a small community that sits on the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the Basse-Côte-Nord region of Quebec. Bradley is an Innu translator,

interpreter and entrepreneur who started getting involved in his community through church activities as a teenager. He is working to create an intergenerational home that offers different services for those in need including legal advice, healing sessions and rooms for people experiencing homelessness. He has also served as a board chair for the community radio station and was selected to participate in Quebec's youth parliament.

Justin Langan is a Métis youth advocate from Swan River, Manitoba, a picturesque town near the Saskatchewan border. He is the Founder and Executive Director of O'KANATA, a non-profit organization focused on supporting Indigenous youth through education and employment opportunities. Justin is also the recipient of the 2021 Métis Youth Inspire Award and the Terry Fox Humanitarian Award, among others. He is currently participating in the Parliamentary Internship Programme at the House of Commons.

Breane Mahlitz is a proud Métis woman with a passion for transforming health outcomes for her people. She is a health policy adviser at the Métis National Council, and she is also pursuing a graduate degree in Indigenous Public Health at the University of British Columbia. Breane recently received the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Award, a scholarship for Métis youth pursuing post-secondary education. She is also the recipient of the Outstanding Youth Award from the Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

Please join me in welcoming — and learning from — these Indigenous youth. *Wela'lin*, thank you.

VOICES OF YOUTH INDIGENOUS LEADERS

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to welcome the participants of this year's Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders. We have previously hosted this event in June for National Indigenous History Month, a time to honour and learn about the diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities from coast to coast to coast.

But colleagues, I think we can all agree that these celebrations and conversations can and must continue year-round. As a former teacher, I know that we have so much to learn from the younger generations.

This week, we have another cohort of young Indigenous leaders doing great work in their communities, and I'm pleased to acknowledge three of these inspiring individuals.

Crystal Starr Lewis is an advocate and youth leader from Vancouver and the Squamish Nation. She is an elected youth representative for the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, and she became a first-generation speaker of her language through Simon Fraser University. Crystal is a leader on anti-trafficking initiatives, and she is working to create a consulting agency that will provide anti-human trafficking prevention training within Indigenous communities. She was

recently invited to the United Nations in Geneva where she provided policy recommendations on this issue and spoke on two panels.

Brett Recollet is Anishinaabe from the Whitefish River First Nation on Manitoulin Island. He has travelled to Ottawa this week from Sudbury, Ontario, where he is an Indigenous support worker for a school board. Brett has a long record of serving in youth leadership roles. It started with his election to his high school student council at age 14. Since then, he has served on various councils and committees at a community, provincial and national level. He was an inaugural member of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's youth council, and he has served on the board of directors for Mental Health Research Canada. He plans to continue his education with a graduate degree focusing on cultural safety within Indigenous education. Brett credits his mother, his sister and his grandmother with teaching him strong leadership skills.

Reanna Merasty McKay is a Nihithaw or "Woodland Cree" artist, writer and advocate from Barren Lands First Nation in northern Manitoba. She has a Master of Architecture and a Bachelor of Environmental Design from the University of Manitoba. She is interning with Number TEN Architectural Group in Winnipeg, working for and with Indigenous communities to bring their stories and histories to life through architecture. Reanna also serves as the Manitoba director on the board of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and as a member of the University of Manitoba's Board of Governors. In 2023, she was named the Youth First Nations Inspire Award Laureate.

Please welcome our wonderful Indigenous youth leaders.

Hon. Paul J. Prosper: Honourable senators, I am thrilled to rise today and pay tribute to the eight participants of Voices of Youth Indigenous Leaders 2024.

• (1410)

While this important annual event is now in its eighth edition, it is my first time being involved since my appointment last year.

It has been said that a leader is someone who steps forward. I am honoured to meet these visionary leaders as a member of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples. Our conversations have already reconfigured my imagination of what can be for Indigenous people and all Canadians in general, and the day is not over yet.

I am learning much from these incredible leaders, including Ethan Paul and Faithe McGuire, whom I will introduce to you now.

Ethan Paul is Mi'kmaw from Membertou First Nation in Nova Scotia. With a passion for politics and empowering Indigenous youth, Ethan served on the Membertou Youth Chief & Council, as well as youth councils and committees for Cuso International, Good Neighbours Canada and Students on Ice. Later, he launched the Membertou Youth Network and founded a sexual and reproductive rights-themed book club with Oxfam Canada, focusing on Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit and Indigenous women authors.

[Senator Martin]

Earlier this year, Ethan represented the United Nations Association in Canada as a youth delegate in the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Faithe McGuire joins us from Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement in Treaty 8 territory in Alberta. She is a documentary filmmaker, photographer and storyteller who captures the stories and histories of her people, the Métis, who were long known as the "forgotten people." Faithe struggled with this label personally, which is still deeply felt among the youth in her community. By digging deep into Indigenous history and her family stories of the Sixties Scoop era, she grounded her identity through Métis history, culture and tradition. Faithe seeks to help Métis youth better understand who they are and where they come from through her films.

Honourable colleagues, these young Indigenous leaders deserve our recognition and gratitude for their incredible work. Please join me in giving them a warm welcome. Thank you. *Wela'liog.*

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 Heather Lank, former parliamentary librarian; her spouse, Julie Spallin; and other colleagues, family and friends.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

THE HONOURABLE MURRAY SINCLAIR, C.C.

Hon. Kim Pate: Honourable senators, I originally sought this statement spot to discuss the seventeenth anniversary — on October 19 — of the homicidal death of Ashley Smith in solitary confinement at the hands of the Correctional Service of Canada, one day after Persons Day and two days after the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty — three days in a row that epitomize the need for us, senators, to act to protect the interests of the dispossessed, oppressed and marginalized.

But the reality of the significant health challenges facing our former colleague the Honourable Murray Sinclair made me alter this plan. Instead, I rise to humbly ask all of you here and in the community to join his family and honour their request that we be part of global efforts to focus our collective love, energy, thoughts, prayers and community support toward our dearly beloved friend and former colleague.

Two months into his tenure here, Senator Sinclair spoke about how the way he was raised led him to believe in and treat this place as Canada's council of elders. He said:

. . . [people to be] treated with great respect, for it is recognized that their experience and life achievements have given them the right to be seen as wise people, and the responsibility to behave as such.

He continued:

We are entrusted to ensure that regional interests are properly considered, that the citizenship and legal rights of minorities are protected, that there is an overall fairness to each law and that the proposed law is clear, concise and constitutional. . . .

In closing, the Honourable Murray Sinclair said:

During our time here, we have an obligation to show Canadians that they expect this place to abide by those two important principles. We will allow and we will assist the government to govern and we will protect the rights of those whose minority positions are threatened by majority rule. We must abide by the proverb that when two foxes and a chicken are voting on what to have for dinner we will stand up for the chicken.

In addition to ensuring we stand up for such proverbial chickens, honourable colleagues, I ask you spend as many seconds, minutes, hours and more that you are able to send this magnificent, kind and compassionate lion of a leader — and friend to so many — your most positive, loving, healing thoughts, prayers and energy.

Meegwetch. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Thi Be Nguyen. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Gerba.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Leo Housakos: Honourable senators, as October draws to a close, we mark the end of Autism Awareness Month here in Canada. Sadly, I am less hopeful this year than I have been in recent years about the direction we are taking in this country on autism.

Last year, we were riding the high of having passed Bill S-203, calling for a federal framework on autism. This legislation put in place specific requirements of the federal government, with specific benchmarks on meeting those requirements, all the while without being so prescriptive as to handcuff officials and stakeholders, including autistic Canadians.

We wanted this legislation to succeed. Furthermore, we wanted the government to succeed in finally presenting a national approach that would result in meaningful change.

Unfortunately, it became evident last winter that developing the framework that was now required by law had become a box-ticking exercise — one that was fixated more on appearing to be doing something rather than actually doing something.

We expressed our disappointment and provided detailed, thoughtful feedback on what we thought was woefully missing from the government's plan. And by "we," I mean me, Senator Boehm, MP Lake and several stakeholders.

Indeed, several of you, colleagues, made the time to meet with stakeholders last April, and you were also disappointed in what you were hearing, so much so that we collectively requested a meeting with the minister, but to no avail, which is something I've rarely ever seen in my time in Parliament.

In the end, the government released its Autism Strategy and framework a couple of weeks ago, and, as we warned would happen, it is being widely panned. As is often the case with box-ticking exercises like the one we have here, the end result is aspirational at best. What's being proposed sounds good, but there are no actual concrete actions or timelines. In short, there is no plan.

As Jamie Peddle, the father of 12-year-old Jacob, told the media:

Not one child on the waiting list for treatment will be taken off the waiting list . . . as a result of this autism strategy.

Mr. Peddle went on to say that instead of helping kids gain access to the treatment they need, the government is focused on creating new consultation bureaucracies to talk amongst themselves, and he's absolutely right. That's all we now have out of Bill S-203. Not one autistic child is or will be better off as a result, never mind those who are aging out of the system and will have resources pulled away from them. But we now have a new bureaucratic body. That's what this government has done with this law. They created a new level of bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, autistic families will continue to struggle to find the help they need. Add this to the list of things, unfortunately, that are broken in our country. Thank you, colleagues.

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Kelly Cooper, President of the Centre for Social Intelligence, and Mark Pearson, Executive Director of the Canadian Institute of Forestry. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator McPhedran.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Nancy Juneau, President of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Cormier.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

• (1420)

FÉDÉRATION CULTURELLE CANADIENNE-FRANÇAISE

Hon. René Cormier: Honourable senators, yesterday, at the National Arts Centre, the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, a leading political voice for arts and culture in Canadian and Acadian francophone communities, which brings together 21 provincial, territorial and national organizations, presented a powerful brief, an impassioned plea for strengthening arts education in our country's schools.

This federation recommends that the federal government initiate a dialogue involving provincial and territorial governments and the community sector with a view to developing a charter for arts education in francophone communities. This recommendation is in keeping with Canada's commitment to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes the right of children to participate in cultural and artistic activities.

Honourable senators, as the federation's brief indicated, one in five parents in Canada reported that there were no art classes at the French elementary school attended by their child or children.

Approximately 20% of young Canadians are affected by mental health issues, and Canada's youth suicide rate is the third highest in the industrialized world.

Finally, in francophone minority communities, 39% of students eligible for French-language education come from an immigrant background. The role of arts education and access to artistic works in addressing the issues I've just mentioned is well established.

Also according to evidence-based briefs, art has significant effects on the physical and mental health of individuals, both in terms of prevention and treatment. On top of that, arts education is proving to be an effective way of supporting the mental health and well-being of students. Not only do artistic endeavours stimulate the development of gross and fine motor skills, but they also push learners to get to know themselves better and establish a deeper connection with themselves. This has a positive impact on children's self-esteem, confidence and sense of well-being.

That's why it is so critical that we pay particular attention to this component of education, while respecting provincial and territorial jurisdictions, of course, as it's one of the pillars needed to build and maintain our democratic society.

I want to congratulate and thank the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française for its leadership on this issue. In closing, as Women's History Month draws to a close, I would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of that organization's current president, Nancy Juneau, a manager and cultural worker who has been involved in many national arts and culture organizations for decades.

[The Hon. the Speaker]

Ms. Juneau, your unwavering commitment, inspiring vision and enlightened humanism are a credit to our country's francophone cultural sector. Thank you, Nancy Juneau, and thank you, colleagues, for your attention.

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 Malaïka Musampa. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Mégie.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[English]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Marcel Desmond. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Bernard.

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, November 5, 2024, at 2 p.m.

THE HONOURABLE JANE CORDY

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

Hon. Judy A. White: Honourable senators, I give notice that, two days hence:

I will call the attention of the Senate to the career of the Honourable Jane Cordy.

QUESTION PERIOD

FINANCE

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Gold, yesterday, I asked you about hackers obtaining millions of dollars from the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, through privacy breaches. Today we learned of another scam, Senator Gold.

Last summer, a taxpayer falsely changed his T4 slips to claim he was owed \$40 million. The CRA started paying him the money.

That's right: It would be funny if it wasn't so sad.

The CRA started paying him the money without verifying his new tax return. They only discovered the scam when a bank alerted the CRA that he was getting an unusual \$10-million payment.

Is that also funny, Senator Simons?

If this guy had been less greedy he would have gotten away with it, and the CRA wouldn't have found other similar scams.

Senator Gold, how can you defend the incompetence, the neglect, the lack of a competent government doing —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gold.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. This also gives me an opportunity to correct something that I said yesterday with regard to this issue. When talking about the other breach, I misspoke.

H&R Block was the target of the hacking but not responsible for it. I want to go on record and apologize for my error.

With regard to your question, this story is an incredible one. I believe it was the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, or CIBC, that flagged the issue to the CRA — and good on them, as we would say. Tax fraud is an important responsibility. The CRA does its best, knowing that it's a prime target for fraud attempts. Indeed, as I've mentioned, it is regularly upgrading its defences and looking out for fraud. With regard to any further comments, I really can't make them —

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

Senator Plett: Where is the accountability? You've increased the number of employees at the CRA by two thirds since 2016, yet it doesn't seem like any of them are rooting out fraud.

The minister responsible for the CRA is one of the four Trudeau cabinet ministers with one foot out of the door, so she's certainly not minding the shop. I doubt if anyone is, Senator Gold.

Who's taking care of Canadian taxpayers?

Senator Gold: The CRA has an enormous responsibility and an enormous job to do. It certainly had an enormous responsibility during the years of the pandemic. Many of these issues, if my understanding of the reporting is correct, had their origins in that area, but, again, it's taking steps to enhance its security and doing everything it can to protect itself — and, therefore, Canadians — against fraud.

PUBLIC SAFETY

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Hon. Leo Housakos: Senator Gold, for too long your government has hidden behind ongoing investigations and classified information to avoid answering questions or doing anything to combat foreign interference in this country. But as we've seen with your handling of the India situation, there are no such concerns in that case. Last fall, the Prime Minister stood in the House and openly discussed it for political expediency. A couple of weeks ago, the RCMP held a press conference about it, again, for political expediency. Now we know that Mr. Trudeau's National Security Advisor was leaking information to foreign newspapers, again, for political expediency. Meanwhile, your government won't release the names of parliamentarians named in the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, or NSICOP, report. Why? Political expediency?

Now every parliamentarian is under a cloud of suspicion, colleagues. Just this week, Senator Woo and a former colleague were identified as being named in the report.

• (1430)

Senator Gold, how is any of this helpful? Will your government release the names and let us get to the bottom of this once and for all?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Housakos, it is really rich to hear you talk about political expediency when your leader, who aspires to lead this government, is refusing to have the security clearance that all other leaders have taken —

An Hon. Senator: Exactly.

Senator Gold: It is also irresponsible to believe that, despite the important risks to national security and to the privacy of individuals that public disclosure would entail. Those are reasons why security clearances are required and Justice Hogue has agreed that these things should not be released publicly.

To stand here and link the threats to this country from India and others as a matter of political expediency and then to once again trot that out is honestly not serious.

Senator Housakos: Senator Gold, it's so disappointing to see that even you are peddling conspiracy theories. You know full well that CSIS can brief Mr. Poilievre at any time under the law under the threat reduction measures. That's the law. Unlike the PM, Mr. Poilievre isn't interested in covering his own butt; he's interested in the best interests of this country. Mr. Poilievre

thinks all Canadians should know who is being compromised. He wants more transparency, while Trudeau wants more secrecy. That is what this is all about.

What do the PMO and Justin Trudeau have to hide? Give us the names and what they are accused of.

Senator Gold: The passion with which you continue to repeat this doesn't take away from the fact that my response is, as the great John McEnroe said to a referee, "Are you serious?" This is not a serious way to deal with important issues of national security.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

VENDOR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Senator Gold, I would like to discuss government procurement and the need to ensure taxpayer dollars achieve the greatest value. More specifically, I want to explore the government's pilot project for a vendor performance management, or VPM, policy.

I understand the testing period started on August 1, 2023. One year into this pilot project, what can you tell us about this program and when we can expect a permanent solution?

As you know, the Procurement Ombud tabled his annual report this summer, in which he called for the implementation of a VPM program to track information on supply performance, arguing that it would offer significant benefits for all federal departments.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, senator. Indeed, the report of the Procurement Ombud is of great interest to the government. My understanding is that the work is ongoing, but I don't have a specific date as to when the government will make whatever changes it decides to. I'll certainly bring your question and concern to the attention of the minister.

Senator Loffreda: Having a permanent VPM program would provide Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, and other departments the ability to assess vendor performance and use past vendor performance information in awarding contracts.

Beyond the VPM policy, the ombud thinks that a new position of chief procurement officer is warranted and could actually lead the creation and implementation of the VPM.

Has the government given any consideration to the ombud's recommendation regarding a chief procurement officer?

Senator Gold: Thank you, senator, for the follow-up question.

I have every confidence the government is considering the recommendations from the ombud and that those recommendations will help inform the next steps going forward in addressing this issue.

FINANCE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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

The Public Accounts of Canada include the audited consolidated financial statements of the Government of Canada, which combine the financial transactions of all government departments and controlled entities. These statements show the actual operating deficit compared to the budget, as well as the net debt position of the government at year end.

To be useful, and to ensure financial transparency and accountability, this information should be available on a timely basis. It has been almost seven months since the last fiscal year ended, and the public accounts for the year ended March 31, 2024, have not yet been released.

You were asked a question by my Finance Committee colleague yesterday regarding the public accounts. Do you have an update on when the public accounts for the year ended March 31, 2024, will be released?

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

I don't have a specific update at this time, but I can confirm to you and the chamber that my office has brought this to the attention of the minister's staff, and I've been advised that the Financial Administration Act, as some of you would know, requires that the Public Accounts of Canada be tabled no later than December 31 following the end of the fiscal year or, if the House is not sitting, within the first 15 sitting days thereafter.

I can assure this chamber that the tabling of the public accounts will occur by the deadline set out in the governing legislation.

Senator MacAdam: Thank you, Senator Gold.

Are steps being taken by the government to evaluate and improve its processes for a more timely release of the public accounts, regardless of what the legislation states?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question.

I understand that the Treasury Board has recently confirmed it will amend the public accounts production master plan to have the public accounts tabled by October 15, starting next year. Tasks included in the master plan will be attributed to the organizations involved in the production of the Public Accounts of Canada, with specific timelines to meet the targeted tabling date.

The government will continue its ongoing work to improve the public accounts both for Canadians and parliamentarians.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Senator Gold, last week, I had the privilege to join a round table discussion hosted by the Afghan Women Parliamentarians & Leaders Network. This week, the Taliban's so-called Minister for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice announced a new restriction that bans women from speaking to each other or even talking or praying loudly enough to be — perish the thought — overheard by other women. This follows recent restrictions prohibiting women from singing, speaking in public or being too “loud” in their homes.

Essentially, the Taliban is silencing woman and erasing their presence from society. That is the very embodiment of gender apartheid.

How is Canada planning to apply new pressure on the Taliban to end this desecration of a fundamental human right?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): The actions of the Taliban have, for a long time, been outrageous, inhumane and in violation of international humanitarian laws and every precept of decency. The further repression and silencing of Afghan women and children is abhorrent. This government condemns, in no uncertain terms, these actions, as it has in the past. It will consider whatever steps are necessary to continue to be engaged in defence of the women, girls and people of Afghanistan who are suffering under this grotesquely repressive regime.

Senator Patterson: Senator Gold, as Afghan women are pushed further and further out of society, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled this month that simply being an Afghan woman is considered sufficient grounds to grant asylum.

Will Canada follow suit with a similar asylum ruling? Are any new programs being developed specifically for women at risk, such as these poor Afghan women?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question.

I'm going to bring this question to the attention of the minister. I'm not aware of any new programs. Those of us in this chamber, as well as those who have been properly advocating, know how challenging it is to provide the assistance these women and girls so desperately need. Canada will continue to do its best.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Hon. Wanda Thomas Bernard: My question is for Senator Gold.

Yesterday, Senator Harder reminded us that we marked 25 years since pay equity legislation passed. While we pause and celebrate that anniversary, he also noted there is still a lot of work to be done. One of the areas that requires our attention is employment equity.

• (1440)

Senator Gold, following the recommendations of the task force report released in December 2023, what is the government's commitment to implementing critical amendments to employment equity that equity-deserving groups have been waiting for?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for this important question. My understanding is that the government's initial commitments to modernize the Employment Equity Act, or EEA, include creating two new designated groups under the EEA, Black people and 2SLGBTQI+ people; and replacing the term “Aboriginal peoples” with “Indigenous peoples” and updating the definition to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit, as well as to ensure that the act is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. It will also replace the term “members of visible minorities” with “racialized people” and update the corresponding definition, and align the definition of persons with disabilities with the Accessible Canada Act to make it more inclusive.

Senator Bernard: Senator Gold, one of the other recommendations was that there be an independent equity commissioner who would report to Parliament. Will the government respond to this recommendation?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question, senator. My understanding is the government is currently seriously considering all of the recommendations of the task force, and these will inform the government's steps when it comes to modernizing the act going forward.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Claude Carignan: Leader, during the break, while I was reading the Canada Gazette, I saw order-in-council no. 2024-1092, dated October 11, which reads as follows:

. . . Her Excellency the Governor General in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister of Justice, under section 26.1 of the Judges Act, appoints Anne Giardini,

O.C., O.B.C., of Rome, Italy, to be Chairperson of the Judicial Compensation and Benefits Commission, for a term of four years

Senator Gold, how is this possible? Are there so few Liberals left in Canada that you have to go all the way to Italy to find a candidate to appoint?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question and for the research you and your office did to inform us about this matter.

I have no details about the appointee you spoke of, or the process and needs involved. However, I am grateful to you for bringing this matter to my attention.

Senator Carignan: When the government leader looks into the matter, could he also reassure us and check whether she will be attending the commission meetings in person? If so, will the government be paying her travel expenses and first-class airfare?

Senator Gold: Thank you. I'll submit all of these questions to the minister.

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Leader, in a note to clients last week, Scotiabank's top economist has this to say about the NDP-Liberal government's handling of Canada's immigration system:

. . . mismanagement of Canada's immigration programs will cost this country for many years. . . . Frankly, as both an economist and a Canadian, I'm utterly ashamed of how this government has so severely botched the immigration file for several years now.

He also said, "There must be accountability for the damage done to Canada's stature as a welcoming, reliable nation for new arrivals."

Leader, where does that accountability lie?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. Minister Miller has been remarkably forthcoming and remarkably candid in acknowledging that in a period following the pandemic, when we desperately needed to increase the number of new arrivals here in order to save our economy from falling into a recession — which, happily, we did not experience — the government did not make the adjustments in the post-pandemic era as quickly as it could. The accountability and responsibility were assumed by this government through Minister Miller. The adjustments that were made were difficult and have been the subject of questions in this chamber, but are nonetheless necessary for the next two years in order to find the right balance between whom we receive and how we can accommodate them.

[Senator Carignan]

Senator Martin: Yes, tragically, the immigration system is currently broken. Food Banks Canada reported on Monday:

Newcomers to Canada who have been in the country for 10 years or less account for 32% of food bank clients, a significant increase from last year. Most clients in this category arrived within the last two years. . . .

Leader, isn't this yet another example of how the NDP-Liberals mismanaged our immigration system?

Senator Gold: Senator, thank you for your question and for once again highlighting the challenges that many Canadians, whether newly arrived or others, are still facing. I repeat: The government made the adjustments to the different immigration programs in recognition that a new balance had to be struck in light of the challenges to our economy and our ability to accommodate. Those changes, we hope, will bear fruit.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON POVERTY

Hon. Kim Pate: Senator Gold, yesterday the annual report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty emphasized a growing sense of desperation and abandonment amongst those most marginalized. Fittingly titled *A Time for Urgent Action*, the report lists as its number one recommendation:

. . . work across governments to introduce a basic income floor, indexed to the cost of living, that would provide adequate resources . . . for people to be able to meet their basic needs, thrive and make choices with dignity

The council notes that guaranteed livable income is a key way that such a floor can be realized. In light of this recommendation from its key advisory council on poverty, what new and concrete steps will the government be taking to evaluate and implement guaranteed livable income?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Pate, thank you for your question and your continued advocacy on this important file. The government is committed to ensuring that Canadian families, workers and seniors are able to make ends meet and have a fair chance to succeed. There is no question that basic income could help to address poverty. There are, as you know, significant design challenges and considerations that require further study, including funding, implications for existing programs and potential effects on the labour market. There have been insufficient pilot projects to date, and that is regrettable.

The government, nonetheless, is continuing its work to provide support to Canadians, lifting over 2.3 million Canadians out of poverty between 2015 and 2021, including over 650,000 children. More needs to be done and will be done.

Senator Pate: Thank you. The National Advisory Council on Poverty report emphasizes that poverty is rising — an increase of 1.4 million people in poverty over two years. The government has taken, as you have identified, laudable first steps towards guaranteed livable income, including the Canada Child Benefit,

which operates as a form of basic income, but it's not enough. The inadequacy of the Canada Disability Benefit has increased concerns, as you know and as we've discussed here.

I just came from Victoria earlier this week, where they are interested in doing another pilot. To your point, does the government agree that it's time to examine next steps?

Senator Gold: I am confident that the government would welcome continuing research, pilots and the like on this important issue because, again, it is an attractive option, but some of the challenges and complications around it should not and cannot be underestimated. I'm not speaking officially for the government, but I have confidence that it would welcome further work in this area.

FINANCE

CANADA EMERGENCY RESPONSE BENEFIT

Hon. Donald Neil Plett (Leader of the Opposition): Senator Gold, this NDP-Liberal government expects Canadians to believe it has no documents that show who is responsible for decisions that led to almost \$8 billion being paid out in fraudulent Canada Emergency Response Benefit, or CERB, claims. In July, we learned about the CRA's response to an access-to-information request that sought the names of those who decided to limit the prepayment eligibility checks on CERB applicants. These routine checks could have rooted out the fraud, leader.

• (1450)

The response from the CRA said, "We have no records pertaining to this request . . ." They have no records.

Leader, how is that possible? How can this incompetent NDP-Liberal government have no records of a decision that cost taxpayers \$8 billion?

An Hon. Senator: Incompetent.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you, again, for raising this issue. The challenges that the CRA and we, as a country, faced when getting help out to Canadians in a timely fashion when the pandemic struck us with such force and intensity are well known and have been much discussed in this chamber.

I'm not aware of the record-keeping practices within the CRA, but the work that the government did through the CRA saved this economy and saved the lives and well-being of hundreds of thousands — if not millions — of Canadian families. Yes, the design of the program was done with full knowledge that a certain price would be paid for getting the cheques out faster than through normal processes, and, unfortunately, that has been the case.

Senator Plett: Nothing is ever the government's fault. If there are no documents about this horrendous mismanagement of \$8 billion, then no one can be held responsible, no one can be fired and there is no accountability.

Leader, is this \$8 billion also gone for good, just like the \$190 million paid to hackers that I mentioned yesterday, Senator Gold? Yes or no?

Senator Gold: I don't know, Senator Plett, how much money may or may not be recovered, but I do know that every effort is being made to ensure that problems with the system do not recur. I have every confidence that that work is ongoing.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Senator Gold, since 2014, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, in order to boost efficiency, has been relying increasingly on artificial intelligence, or AI, algorithms in immigration processing. Senators on the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, or SOCI, have raised concerns about transparency, data security and innate discriminatory biases in AI use. Many Canadians share our concerns about skewed assessments discriminating on grounds such as country of origin, gender or socio-economic status. In the U.K., a similar AI visa process was discontinued when bias was proven.

Senator Gold, are legitimate applications to Canada, including study permits for Afghan women and girls endangered by gender apartheid, being denied by bots or by humans?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for raising an increasingly obvious point: Any system that uses a computer, in some sense, is also going to be subject to the algorithms that are either embedded in it or created for it.

I'm not aware of the specifics of your question, but the extent to which any of our systems, however managed — even those used by humans to evaluate files — contain biases, embedded or not, is a serious matter, and I'll certainly bring this to the attention of the minister.

Senator McPhedran: Thank you, Senator Gold.

I think we can agree that opaque decision making makes it difficult — sometimes impossible — to challenge discriminatory decisions.

Given Canada's commitment to a fair immigration system, how is the Government of Canada ensuring oversight and transparency so that IRCC is not discriminatory?

Senator Gold: The challenge of rooting out embedded or systemic structured biases that can result in discrimination in decision making is a perennial one. I won't say it's more difficult in an AI or algorithm world than it was in earlier times, but it certainly isn't getting any easier to do that.

Again, I will bring this question to the attention of the minister. Thank you.

PUBLIC SAFETY

CRIME RATES

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Leader, a recent Canadian Federation of Independent Business, or CFIB, report looking at the impact of rising crime shows 92% of small business owners believe your government should change how it handles repeat offenders. A business owner in New Brunswick told the CFIB:

The catch and release change the federal government has made is reducing business and community safety, driving up insurance costs, driving up business costs to replace what is being stolen, and reducing efficiency and productivity because we are always forced to take steps to protect our people and assets.

Leader, what is the NDP-Liberal government's response to this small business owner? Do you agree?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Individuals — whether small business owners, individuals, artists or entrepreneurs — deserve to be safe in their homes, safe in their places of work, safe on their streets and safe in their cities.

The issue of how our legal system and our judicial system deal with those who have committed crimes and served their time is a complex one that engages issues of public policy, evidence — sociological and otherwise — and our constitutional norms. We have a system that places responsibility and trust in independent organizations and agencies, including the courts, and these are the pillars of our democracy. The government will continue to —

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

Senator Martin: Crime is on the rise, and small businesses are feeling the impact directly. Over the last year, the percentage of small businesses in British Columbia that report being impacted by crime jumped by 27% — the biggest increase in Canada.

One local business owner told the *Vancouver Sun*, "It's a war zone down there. They steal from me every day . . . We are victims every day . . ."

Why has this government done nothing to change course and stop the crimes small businesses deal with every day?

Senator Plett: Exactly.

Senator Gold: We have laws against crime. In most cases we have police forces under the jurisdiction of the provinces, and in some cases we have the independent RCMP who are subcontracted and doing their job. The government will continue to work with provinces and territories and support the police in their work so that Canadians can be and feel safe.

ANSWERS TO ORDER PAPER QUESTION TABLED

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, including the Canadian Pari-Mutuel Agency, Canadian Grain Commission and Farm Products Council of Canada.

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

CANADIAN NORTHERN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

NATIONAL REVENUE—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Canada Revenue Agency.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF CANADA FOR THE
REGIONS OF QUEBEC—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions.

FISHERIES, OCEANS AND THE CANADIAN COAST GUARD—
GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Fisheries and Oceans Canada, including the Canadian Coast Guard.

INDIGENOUS SERVICES—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Indigenous Services Canada, including Indian Oil and Gas Canada.

NATIONAL DEFENCE—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — National Defence, Military Grievances External Review Committee, Communications Security Establishment, Military Police Complaints Commission and National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Environment and Climate Change Canada, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada and Parks Canada.

EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS
FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Employment and Social Development Canada, Accessibility Standards Canada and Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

FEDERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY FOR
SOUTHERN ONTARIO—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS
FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

FEDERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY FOR
NORTHERN ONTARIO—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS
FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario.

FINANCE—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Department of Finance Canada and Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS
FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Global Affairs Canada and Invest in Canada.

HEALTH—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Patented Medicine Prices Review Board.

CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS
FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES—
GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Immigration Refugee Board of Canada.

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, including its special operating agencies, Copyright Board of Canada, Canadian Space Agency, National

Research Council Canada, Statistics Canada, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY GENERAL—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Department of Justice Canada, Canadian Human Rights Commission and Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada.

ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Natural Resources Canada, Canada Energy Regulator, Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and Northern Pipeline Agency.

• (1500)

PACIFIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Pacific Economic Development Canada.

CANADIAN HERITAGE—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Canadian Heritage, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, Library and Archives Canada, National Film Board of Canada, National Battlefields Commission, Canadian Conservation Institute and Canadian Heritage Information Network.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Privy Council Office.

JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY GENERAL—PUBLIC PROSECUTION
SERVICE—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

PRAIRIES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Prairies Economic Development Canada.

PUBLIC SAFETY, DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Public Safety Canada, Canada Border Services Agency, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Correctional Service of Canada, Parole Board of Canada and Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Public Services and Procurement Canada and Shared Services Canada.

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY AND YOUTH—GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Women and Gender Equality Canada.

TREASURY BOARD—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and Canada School of Public Service.

TRANSPORT—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR
VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Transport Canada and Canadian Transportation Agency.

PUBLIC SAFETY, DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS—CANADIAN
INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT—
GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, Public Service Commission of Canada and Transportation Safety Board of Canada.

VETERANS AFFAIRS—GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS FOR VIRTUAL
STAFF MEETINGS

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) tabled the response to Question No. 147, dated March 30, 2022, appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper* in the name of the Honourable Senator Housakos, regarding government contracts for virtual staff meetings — Veterans Affairs Canada and Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUBLIC COMPLAINTS AND REVIEW COMMISSION BILL

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Omidvar, seconded by the Honourable Senator Clement, for the third reading of Bill C-20, An Act establishing the Public Complaints and Review Commission and amending certain Acts and statutory instruments.

Hon. Réjean Aucoin: Honourable senators, I rise today to support Bill C-20, An Act establishing the Public Complaints and Review Commission and amending certain Acts and statutory instruments. Bill C-20, which seeks to establish the Public Complaints and Review Commission, is a major step forward in our pursuit of a transparent and accountable public administration.

As you know, the new Public Complaints and Review Commission will continue to review complaints regarding the RCMP and it will also become the independent review body for complaints regarding the Canada Border Services Agency. Thus, as Senator Omidvar stated on June 18, and I quote:

For the first time in our history, both law enforcement agencies will fall under scrutiny of one external review body.

That is an important and welcome step forward.

However, I would add a word of caution: Bill C-20 does not make any reference to Canada's two official languages. I would remind senators that the Official Languages Act covers the following institutions:

. . . any board, commission or council, or other body or office, established to perform a governmental function by or pursuant to an Act of Parliament or by or under the authority of the Governor in Council . . .

Subclause 3(1) of Bill C-20 indicates that the commission consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and not more than three other members, appointed by the Governor in Council.

Under the heading "Diversity and other factors," we are told the following:

In making recommendations for appointments of members of the Commission, the Minister must seek to reflect the diversity of Canadian society and must take into account considerations such as gender equality and the overrepresentation of certain groups in the criminal justice system, including Indigenous peoples and Black persons.

Colleagues, while this principle is unassailable, as an Acadian from Nova Scotia and a francophone senator who has battled for years in support of the language rights of official language minority communities, I would have appreciated some reference to the language skills of this commission's members. Naturally, I am referring to skills pertaining to Canada's two official languages.

When I raise this issue under different circumstances, I'm often told that the commission will operate in both official languages. That means that staff will be bilingual, but nothing stops the Governor in Council from appointing unilingual members. Why not clearly include language skills in the commission member selection criteria? Canada is a bilingual nation, rich in linguistic and cultural diversity. Our national identity is shaped by two official languages, and it is imperative that all of our institutions and laws reflect this.

The Public Complaints and Review Commission will be responsible for examining complaints from the public from across the country. In order for the commission to fulfill its mandate effectively, its members must be able to speak and understand both of Canada's official languages.

The members' ability to communicate in both French and English is a matter of respect not only for official language minority communities, but also for all francophone and anglophone Canadians. It's also a question of efficiency and inclusiveness, since the commission can convene hearings that may be public.

In these circumstances, it goes without saying that members must be able to understand deliberations and testimony in the official language in which they are presented. A commission made up of bilingual members will be better able to understand the cultural nuances and specific issues facing francophone and anglophone people across Canada. This will enhance the review of complaints, which will lead to more informed decisions. It's also important to recognize that language conveys an entire culture for Canadians.

I'll close by saying that it would have been both simple and wise to add the words "the Official Languages Act" to subclause 3(1) of Bill C-20, under the heading "Diversity and other factors", which reads as follows:

(1.1) In making recommendations for appointments of members of the Commission, the Minister must seek to reflect the diversity of Canadian society and must take into account considerations such as gender equality and the overrepresentation of certain groups in the criminal justice system, including Indigenous peoples and Black persons.

The government has chosen not to do so, and has systematically chosen not to do so in most bills involving similar circumstances. When I arrived in the Senate a year ago, I spoke on the amendment to Bill C-35 to ensure that the funding clause would take official language minority communities into account.

I'm not proposing an amendment to add that text to Bill C-20 at this point because the political climate is not conducive to that, and I don't want to delay the passage of this bill, which is so

important to Canadians. A simple reference to the Official Languages Act in the criteria for appointing members would in no way guarantee that appointed members and support staff would be bilingual, since these individuals are appointed by the Minister of Justice. However, it would nonetheless recognize that Canada does have two official languages when the time came to appoint members of the commission. It goes without saying that the minister should appoint members from both of the country's linguistic communities, since we have two official languages.

Tomorrow is Halloween, but October 31 has special significance for me, since it marks my first anniversary as a senator. I want you to know, colleagues, that the official languages will always be a key issue for me, and I will speak up any time it is not taken into account in any bill that comes to us, regardless of the government in power. For me, it's a simple question of respect for and recognition of the country's linguistic duality.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

• (1510)

[*English*]

INHERITED BLOOD DISORDERS AWARENESS DAY BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Leave having been given to proceed to Other Business, Senate Public Bills, Second Reading, Order No. 30:

Hon. Jane Cordy moved second reading of Bill S-288, An Act respecting Inherited Blood Disorders Awareness Day.

She said: Honourable senators, I would like to thank everybody for being very kind to me today, starting with Senator Plett at our meeting yesterday afternoon after the Senate sitting.

First, I would like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you today on the unceded land of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people.

Colleagues, I rise today to speak at second reading of Bill S-288, An Act respecting Inherited Blood Disorders Awareness Day. This bill will designate October 18 of each year as Inherited Blood Disorders Awareness Day in Canada.

I have spoken many times in this chamber about sickle cell disease and the work that many are doing to raise awareness of the disease in Canada. It is through my collaboration with the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Canada and other regional associations, including the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Atlantic Canada, that I bring this bill forward today.

Sickle cell disease is one of a family of relatively rare inherited blood disorders, which also includes thalassemia, hemophilia A and B, von Willebrand disease, rare clotting factor deficiencies, platelet function disorders, aplastic anemia and fanconi anemia.

Bill S-288 would bring all inherited blood disorders under one umbrella for the purposes of raising awareness and prompting better understanding. This would go a long way to improving outcomes for people living with these conditions. As the saying goes, "A rising tide lifts all boats."

Honourable senators, this bill will also improve awareness of these diseases. Inherited disorders affect cellular and non-cellular components of the blood and are present in all ethnic groups, but certain populations may experience higher prevalence rates.

Sickle cell disease and thalassemia, for example, both affect the oxygen-carrying component of red blood cells. They can be passed on to children when both parents are carriers of the sickle cell gene.

Sickle cell disease affects nearly 100 million people globally. An estimated 6,000 Canadians live with sickle cell disease today. Thalassemia patients can require regular blood transfusions, which can impact the liver, heart and endocrine organs. This can lead to skeletal and growth abnormalities, as well as diabetes.

Although curative therapies for both conditions have recently been developed, they remain under review.

Sickle cell disease is found worldwide, but is most prevalent in people of African, Indian, Mediterranean, Southern European and Southeast Asian descent. Considering Canada's rich multicultural tapestry, sickle cell disease and thalassemia are significant health concerns for thousands of Canadians.

As Cynthia Musonda, founder of The Sickle Cell Awareness Network of Saskatchewan, aptly stated:

People living with sickle cell disease in Canada represent a demographic with multifaceted needs, and unlike similar diseases, face numerous barriers to attain optimal quality of life.

Bessie Calabria, President of the Thalassemia Foundation of Canada, also noted that a day that officially recognizes inherited blood disorders nationally:

. . . will allow patients . . . to better advocate for accommodations at school, in the workplace, and within healthcare environments. It can also help with the prevention of thalassemia through appropriate carrier and pre-natal screening, reducing the burden on government resources.

The lack of awareness of these diseases must be addressed, as it often leads to stigmatization, misdiagnosis and improper treatment.

Colleagues, sickle cell disease may be the most common inherited blood disorder worldwide, but it is far from the only one.

Other conditions that affect blood cells are known as structural red blood cell disorders. Inherited white blood cell disorders are another subset of hereditary blood disorders.

Although less common, these conditions often affect children and involve abnormalities in the quantity of infection-fighting white blood cells. These conditions predispose patients to various debilitating infections.

Inherited bleeding disorders are a family of diseases in which blood clotting proteins or platelets that help the blood to clot are missing or do not function properly, resulting in prolonged bleeding. These conditions include hemophilia A and B, von Willebrand disease, rare factor deficiencies and platelet function disorders. The main risk for children and adults with these disorders is internal bleeding mainly into muscles and joints or vital organs, the result of which are very serious consequences or even death.

The most common among these diseases are hemophilia A and B. They are very rare disorders and are more prevalent in males. Hemophilia A affects fewer than 1 in 10,000 people. Hemophilia B is even less common, affecting approximately 1 in 50,000 people.

Treatment needed by a person with an inherited bleeding disorder is provided at a comprehensive care clinic, and while gene therapy is a viable therapeutic intervention, it is only available in Canada for hemophilia B patients.

This particularly underscores the disparity in the scientific research on a disease with a long-documented history. Due to factors relating to a lack of awareness and funding, these diseases remain virtually untreated. The enactment of this bill would certainly bring us closer to finding treatments and enhancing the quality of life and quality of care of affected patients.

• (1520)

Patients with abnormalities in their white blood cells face significant immunodeficiency, impacting their quality of life.

These conditions include aplastic anemia, which is characterized by insufficient blood cell production in the bone marrow. While this is a rare and serious condition, with prompt and proper care, symptoms can be managed through various treatment options.

To cite the words of Cindy Anthony, the Executive Director of the Aplastic Anemia & Myelodysplasia Association of Canada:

. . . [a] hereditary blood disorders day would go a long way in raising awareness of [aplastic anemia] and improve access of patients to life-saving therapies.

Colleagues, due to their rarity, disorders such as the ones I have mentioned are often overlooked or underdiagnosed and have the possibility of becoming understudied within the scientific community, which subsequently leads to less work toward treatment and prevention.

[Senator Cordy]

However, honourable senators, with your support, we can take action to raise greater awareness of these diseases and others like them with the official recognition on a national scale through the establishment of an inherited blood disorders awareness day in Canada on October 18 of every year.

With the passage of this bill, Canada would be a world leader and become the first to have a nationally recognized day for all inherited blood disorders.

The Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario, the Thalassemia Foundation of Canada, the Aplastic Anemia & Myelodysplasia Association of Canada, the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Atlantic Canada and the Sickle Cell Awareness Network of Saskatchewan have signed on as member groups of the Global Action Network for Sickle Cell & Other Inherited Blood Disorders advocating for such an awareness day in Canada.

The Global Action Network for Sickle Cell & Other Inherited Blood Disorders was incorporated in 2022 to unite the forces of organizations serving inherited blood disorders in order to better amplify their impact globally.

The Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario was a founding member of this network. This global partnership aims to improve outcomes for people living with inherited blood disorders worldwide through data-driven advocacy, collaboration and capacity building.

This year, the Global Action Network for Sickle Cell & Other Inherited Blood Disorders reached a consensus to recognize October 18 as the day of awareness. The global community recently celebrated the first World Inherited Blood Disorders Day, with the theme “From Awareness to Action: Transforming Lives.”

Honourable colleagues, I wish to emphasize the importance of unifying these otherwise individual rare hereditary diseases under a single banner. As Lanre Tunji-Ajayi from the Global Action Network for Sickle Cell & Other Inherited Blood Disorders has stated:

Without proper awareness and national programs, many children born with these debilitating disorders may not be identified, may receive poor care, or die prematurely.

This concerted effort will not only maximize visibility and advocacy for these patients, many of whom belong to marginalized communities. In the words of Sanjeev Wadhvani, the chair of the board of directors of the Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario:

Inherited blood disorders, such as sickle cell disease, hemophilia, thalassemia and aplastic anemia are extremely complex, debilitating chronic conditions that rely on multidisciplinary care and patient-centric programs for families impacted by these diseases. . . . Recognizing hereditary blood disorders day in Canada is a key significant step towards raising awareness of the impact of these diseases across our patient community, health care providers, policy-makers, industry partners and [the] general public.

Additionally, Rugi Jalloh, the President and CEO of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Atlantic Canada, has said:

Improved awareness and education around hereditary blood disorders will ensure that the affected Canadians can effectively manage their disease and this will lead to reduced health care costs for the government.

Honourable senators, we tend to forget the large impact that smaller bills such as Bill S-288 can have for Canadians, particularly vulnerable Canadians who often feel overlooked. Let us heed the words of these patient organizations seeking our support and illuminate the shadows where neglected hereditary blood disorders have dwelt for far too long.

I'm hopeful that you will support this bill — this first step — in order to amplify the voices of these patients very much in need of acknowledgement and care. I thank you.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

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 3:27 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 2 p.m.)

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