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Thursday, March 26, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Thursday, March 26, 2026

The Senate met at 1:30 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

[*Translation*]

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

SNOW CRAB INDUSTRY

Hon. Réjean Aucoin: Honourable senators, I rise today to tell you about a resource that many of you here are not familiar with, even though it is essential to the economy of many coastal communities. I'm talking about the snow crab, the fishing season for which starts in a few days.

Although snow crab is popular with connoisseurs, commercial fishing for this abundant crustacean really only began in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, it was a small fishery that often complemented other more traditional fisheries, such as cod.

However, with the major collapse of cod stocks in the early 1990s and the expansion of the market, the snow crab industry experienced significant growth. In 2023, which was a banner year, the estimated value of landings was between $800 million and $1 billion, or 17% of all fish and crustacean landings.

For many Gulf of St. Lawrence regions, such as Cape Breton, the Acadian Peninsula in New Brunswick, Quebec's North Shore and Newfoundland and Labrador, the snow crab fishery has become a true lifeline and the heart of economic activity. I cannot imagine what would happen to my village of Chéticamp or to Pleasant Bay and Neil's Harbour if this fishery were to one day collapse like the cod fishery did.

However, this resource remains fragile and is particularly sensitive to environmental fluctuations, including warming waters and changes in marine ecosystems. Stock fluctuations over the years remind us of the need for sound management based on science, as well as close collaboration among fishers, scientists and governments. In 2024 and 2025, there was a significant drop in quotas and volumes in several areas of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, as a result of which the total value of landings is now declining.

It is always a great pleasure for me to visit the wharves in my region to observe the crab landings and to bring this precious commodity home to enjoy it. It reminds me of growing up and spending time with family and friends as we enjoyed snow crab.

I encourage you to pay special attention to this industry, its development and the challenges it's facing. We must look beyond the figures and realize that the future of entire communities is closely linked to the health of this resource. To those of you who have the opportunity to taste snow crab, perhaps as early as April 1, I say *bon appétit*.

Thank you.

[*English*]

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, I stand to pay tribute to the committee members of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples. This first tribute is specifically to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit senators.

Understanding the impact of politics and legislation on the lives of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and non-status peoples is no simple task. No people in Canada have interacted with as many complex layers of government and politics over the centuries as First Nations and Inuit Peoples have. No other people have their relationship with the state defined as First Nations and Inuit do.

Thank you for reconciling your obligations with the complex challenge of recognizing and advancing sovereignty and nationhood.

As ambassadors for the Senate and our people simultaneously, you exist in two worlds: the colonial, democratic institution of the Senate, from where you provide service, advocacy, education, awareness and voice, but you also represent our people who are engaged in historical and ongoing struggles against oppression, discrimination and racism. Reconciling your roles within the context of these two worlds is at the heart of your representation.

Thank you for everything you were before you came to the Senate. You needed that lived experience, with its cultural teachings and ways of being and knowing, so that you could educate and build awareness to foster compassion within this chamber and in committee.

Thank you for your dedication to see and fight racism, seek justice, and bring hope and change to First Nations, Métis, Inuit and non-status lives.

As senators, you advocate directly for their interests, rights, priorities and goals, although the ways you do so are unfortunately shaped and constrained by Canada's colonial institutions. You skillfully manœuvre through both the opportunities and obstacles built into the system.

As stated by one of the elected First Nations in a study:

> Every day as a Chief you're fighting the government to make changes. One of the ways to make change is to get on the inside and make changes on the inside. You respect the nationhood of the nation that you come from. They want their sovereignty and self-determination. That is critical, that needs to happen. But you've got to find ways to make it happen.

When you saw something wrong, like discrimination, and you had the capacity to make it right, you understood the sacred responsibility to make it right and you did.

How do you make a difference? Beautiful things start with just one, but when you work together, it is so much more powerful. Thank you. I am so honoured to walk this journey with you. *Kinanâskomitinawow*.

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 Leah Ballantyne, lawyer and member of Mathias Colomb Cree Nation. She is the guest of the Honourable Senator Pate.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO CERTAIN EVENTS AT THE PRISON FOR WOMEN IN KINGSTON

Hon. Kim Pate: Honourable senators, April 1 will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Honourable Justice Louise Arbour's report following the commission of inquiry into illegal treatment and human rights violations of women at the Prison for Women in Kingston. Most of the women were Indigenous; all had experienced abuse as children and adults. In April 1994, they were unlawfully stripped, shackled and left naked in segregation cells by male guards.

As the first outsider to enter after these events, I advocated with corrections, the Correctional Investigator and the minister for an urgent, independent investigation, remedying of the ongoing human rights violations and release of the women from segregation.

• (1340)

When I reported what I had witnessed and heard from the women and staff, correctional officials insisted that laws and policies had not been breached and cautioned me about supporting "cons" and "con-lovers."

In the ensuing year, my integrity and employment were repeatedly threatened, and corrections tried to secure an injunction to prevent the media from exposing the events and their cover-up.

Following an expose by the CBC's "The Fifth Estate" and a special report of the Correctional Investigator, Solicitor General Herb Gray and Attorney General Allan Rock commissioned the Arbour inquiry.

Justice Arbour described the ignorance and absence of the rule of law in prisons, recommending judicial oversight of corrections and remedies for prisoners.

Thirty years on, corrections' human rights and Charter breaches continue.

Justice Arbour's approach, unclouded by electoral or political issues, illuminated our obligation to uphold dignity and human rights. During the inquiry, she insisted that the women with whom she met be unshackled, and she demonstrated the legal and moral imperative of recognizing their humanity, human rights and entitlement to the protection of the rule of law.

In 2019, the Senate passed amendments to Bill C-83 to require correctional authorities to apply to a Superior Court before isolating an individual for more than 48 hours and to implement remedies for prisoners. A 2021 Human Rights Committee report echoed these calls. In 2024, we passed Bill S-230 and sent it to the other place.

As senators, our privilege of walking in and out of prisons comes with the responsibility of exposing and remedying the violations of human rights that we witness. Given what we have seen and heard, this chamber does not have the luxury of remaining silent. To this end, today and every day, I thank Justice Arbour and each of you, honourable senators, for all you do to try and uphold human rights and the rule of law for all.

Meegwetch, thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

VISITOR IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Patrick Awashish Wapachee, a young member of the Cree and Atikamekw Nations. He is the guest of the Honourable Senator Audette.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

NOTWITHSTANDING CLAUSE

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Honourable senators, Supreme Court hearings on the notwithstanding clause have put a debate that upsets me back in the news.

The prohibitions in Quebec are piling up. First came the prohibition against teachers wearing headscarves, the hijab, which was then expanded to include all school staff and will soon be expanded again to include all early childhood centres. We're talking about hundreds of Muslim women who wear the hijab in an education-related setting.

In the name of state secularism, a certain form of feminism and Quebec values, people are claiming to be liberating Muslim women from the oppression of the headscarf, without considering that the hijab means different things to different women in different countries.

I became deeply involved in this debate in my former role as president of Quebec's Conseil du statut de la femme in 2023, when the government of the day introduced its famous charter of values. I publicly voiced my concerns over the consequences of this charter, which risked turning away Muslim women wearing headscarves from women's shelters and depriving them of the very jobs they depended on for emancipation and integration.

No one is denying that Quebec has had a troubled relationship with religion. Before the Quiet Revolution, the Catholic Church dictated what women had to do: procreate, submit to their husbands and perform their marital duty. All of this has left a mark.

However, times have changed. We cannot compare the collective oppression of that era with the fact that a number of Muslim women wear the hijab here in Quebec. Of course, some women face pressure from their communities, their spouses and the patriarchy, but others wear the hijab because of their faith, which is at the core of their identity. Furthermore, there have never been any studies or evidence to suggest that these hijabi women are proselytizing in schools.

These women are often afraid to speak out for fear of being further ostracized. Last Sunday, the Radio-Canada program "Tout terrain" introduced us to Nadia, speaking on condition of anonymity, who was forced to remove her hijab to continue working at a school in Laval. She said:

> It upset me. It upset me so much, I cried. I had a lot of sleepless nights. I've been wearing the hijab for a long time. I believe in my religion. I care about my religion. I don't understand why religion bothers them. We are doing our job. We're there to support the children.

This single mother can't afford to lose her job, but she feels very guilty.

Kadidja, meanwhile, decided to stop wearing her hijab because of the prevailing climate in Quebec. She said:

> I needed to stop being seen, to go unnoticed, to no longer have to endure those cruel, hostile stares. Another reason that drove me was the need for protection, to protect myself and my children. I didn't want us to be the target of that hatred anymore.

These words powerfully convey the perverse effect that these various laws can have on the fabric of Quebec society and on openness toward others.

It's sad.

[*English*]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Ms. Antonia Macris, a youth leader in corporate learning management, who is accompanied by her parents. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Loffreda.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

REPEAT OFFENDERS

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, on March 12, Chong Woo Kim was behind the counter of his little shop in Montreal's Plateau Mont-Royal neighbourhood. The 55-year-old owner of the Fleur bleue convenience store was an honest man who ran a small retail business and was much admired by the community and local customers. He was a calm, unassuming and very hard-working man. He was well known to all the locals, a familiar face and a reassuring presence behind the counter of his convenience store, a part of everyday life. His family, too, is described as respected and hard-working. They are, quite simply, good people.

On March 12, fate put Mr. Kim on the path of a dangerous repeat offender. He was stabbed to death in his shop. This brutal, senseless and unthinkable crime has left a family and a community in shock.

The 35-year-old man accused of this murder, Xavier Gellatly, has an extensive and disturbing criminal record.

Over the past two decades, he has been convicted of armed assault, murder, assault, threats, possession of weapons and breach of conditions. In 2012, he stabbed two people in a Vancouver hotel room, killing Chelsea Holden, a mother of two.

Even in custody, he continued to display violent behaviour, stabbing an inmate and assaulting a correctional officer.

Despite this history, despite warnings about how dangerous he was, he was released from custody on several occasions. This ticking time bomb was walking freely on our streets. Just recently, he was stopped in Montreal and he had a knife in his possession, yet he only received a fine.

Now, Mr. Kim is dead. His family, friends and community have lost a loved one.

Honourable senators, we must ask ourselves a simple yet serious question: How could an individual with such a violent past have ended up free on our streets?

This tragedy reminds us that judicial decisions have very real consequences, and that the lenient guidelines we, as legislators, provide to our courts are no different. When, due to our laxity or naivety, a violent repeat offender is still able to strike and kill, the public's trust is shaken.

Today, my thoughts are with Mr. Kim's family, his loved ones and all those affected by this tragedy.

My condolences to the entire family.

[*English*]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of John McCoy, Executive Director of the Organization for the Prevention of Violence; Mike King, Deputy Executive Director; and Steve Camp, Project Director, Hate Crime Centre. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Wells (*Alberta*).

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Hon. Toni Varone: Honourable senators, today, I rise to pay homage and to honour a defining moment in our nation's history: the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

In April 1917, four divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force united to reclaim Vimy Ridge, a strategic high ground that had eluded the Allied forces for two years. The Battle of Vimy Ridge was a defining World War I battle in Northern France, where all four Canadian divisions fought together for the first time, capturing the heavily fortified seven-kilometre ridge. It is a symbol of Canadian national pride and sacrifice, marking a major step toward independence. It is now considered by historians as a major nation-building event.

• (1350)

As the sun rose on the morning of April 9, the air was thick with anticipation and hope, tempered by the harsh realities of war, yet the exceptional bravery of our soldiers demonstrated collective resolve. Each soldier recognized that he was part of something greater than himself, fighting not merely for land but for their brothers in arms, their families and the essence of their Canadian identity. It was here where Canada emerged from the shadows of its British colonial past, forging its own identity on the world stage where Canada achieved a victory that previous British and French assaults had failed to secure.

Vimy was not simply a matter of military strategy; it was about the resilience and determination of a nation uniting for a common cause. The meticulous planning and innovative tactics illustrated the coming of age of a nation that had — until that moment — not yet understood its place in the world.

The cost of this success was profound. For every inch gained on that ridge, countless lives were lost. More than 10,000 Canadians were wounded, with some 3,600 making the ultimate sacrifice.

As we commemorate this victory, let us not forget those young men, full of dreams and aspirations, who gave everything for their country. They were brothers, sons and fathers, and their loss left a deep void in families and communities across our nation.

The memory of Vimy Ridge resonates in our hearts today, reminding us of the values that bind us as Canadians: courage, sacrifice and a commitment to stand shoulder to shoulder in adversity. This truly was our first "elbows up" moment. Let us honour their memory by upholding these values and remembering that we are stronger together.

In commemorating the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we celebrate a spirit forged in the trenches of war, tempered by loss but illuminated by hope. In this world, we should always strive for peace, understanding and unity — values that are deeply ingrained in our Canadian identity.

Since 2006, the Vimy Foundation has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of this critical event and its lasting significance in Canada's heritage. Their efforts to educate us all and to commemorate those Canadian soldiers who gave of themselves 109 years ago in their service to this country are worthy of our remembrance of their sacrifice.

As we approach Vimy Week, I invite you to consider wearing the Vimy Pins that I have left for all of you in the senators' lounge. The Vimy Pin serves as a visible symbol of remembrance and unity. I am grateful for the support of Veterans Affairs Canada, and in particular, I would like to thank Minister McKnight for facilitating this important initiative.

Colleagues, it has been my honour to address you today, and I thank you for your time.

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 Indigenous youth leaders from British Columbia. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Wilson.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

STUDY ON SEAL POPULATIONS—EIGHTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TABLED DURING THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT—GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TABLED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government response, dated March 26, 2026, to the eighth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and

Oceans, entitled *Sealing the Future: A Call to Action*, deposited with the Clerk of the Senate on May 23, 2024, during the First Session of the Forty-fourth Parliament.

(Pursuant to rule 12-23(4), this response and the original report are deemed referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.)

[*Translation*]

STUDY ON FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT THE CREATION OF HOUSING

SEVENTH REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Claude Carignan: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, entitled *Build Canada Homes: Proposals for Success and Accountability* and I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

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

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places).

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

[*English*]

QUESTION PERIOD

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: My questions are for the government leader in the Senate.

My questions yesterday regarding funding for residential school survivors and mental health were not answered. Finance Canada did not respond when these same questions were posed.

Will you be extending funding for Indian residential school survivors and mental health before the end of March — yes or no?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question.

I have no indication at this moment whether there will be additional funding. Like I answered yesterday regarding the question you asked, the government is committed to supporting Indigenous communities, Indigenous health services and Indigenous school programs. At this time, I have no indication of any specific amount that will be released.

Senator McCallum: Thank you.

Yesterday evening, we met with representatives and Chiefs about the work being done in relation to the identification of unmarked graves. At that time, they told us work has stopped and they are still waiting for funding today.

Will there be funds provided toward the efforts surrounding the identification of unmarked graves?

Senator Moreau: Thank you for the question.

At this moment, to date, the government has invested more than $255 million toward 162 Indigenous-led commemoration and search projects through the Residential Schools Missing Children Community Support Fund. There are funds available, and the government is committed to continuing to support Indigenous communities regarding the unmarked graves.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

CANADIAN FORCES SNOWBIRDS

Hon. Denise Batters: Senator Moreau, two years ago, I asked former defence minister Bill Blair to commit to future funding for the gem of the Royal Canadian Air Force: the Snowbirds, also known as 431 Air Demonstration Squadron. He refused to commit to even the ongoing $10-million annual funding.

• (1400)

Your Liberal government struggled to meet its 2% NATO defence spending obligation, let alone the anticipated 5% future target. This is the perfect time to buy replacement jets for the Snowbirds and keep them flying high for decades to come. This week, however, your government tabled its plan for cuts at the Department of National Defence. It says that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces will:

> . . . retire selected fleets that are nearing the end of their service lives, face rising sustainment costs, and that either no longer align with future Canadian Armed Forces operational requirements or for which replacement capabilities have already been identified.

This sounds an awful lot like a plan to ground the Snowbirds forever. Is that true? If so, shame on your government.

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Was that a question or an answer?

If it is a question, my understanding is that the investment pledge to NATO has been reached. The 2% of gross domestic product, or GDP, has been reached as of yesterday.

As far as the Snowbirds are concerned, I have no specific information regarding your question, but I will raise it with the minister, and I'll get back to you. I have no indication that there is any intention of indefinitely grounding the Snowbirds. It is not my understanding that the government is supportive of the answer you gave to your own question.

Senator Batters: Senator Moreau, the Snowbirds are not a surplus item. They are a critical recruitment tool for the Canadian Armed Forces and a mighty symbol of patriotic pride at a time when Canada needs — now, more than ever — to showcase our national strength and sovereignty.

Which Canadian's heart doesn't soar as they watch the Snowbirds perform the Maple Leaf Split over Parliament Hill? Canadians love the Snowbirds. They unite us. Can you please promise today — for Canadians — that your Liberal government will not sacrifice our beloved Snowbirds?

Senator Moreau: I must remind you that the government has made an unprecedented investment in the Canadian Armed Forces. Even the Conservative government has not invested as much as the Liberal government is right now.

As far as the Snowbirds are concerned, I have no indication that the government intends to ground the Snowbirds indefinitely, but I will raise your question with the minister, and I will provide you with an answer.

PUBLIC SAFETY

EDMONTON INSTITUTION FOR WOMEN

Hon. Paula Simons: My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Today, in the chamber, we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Arbour report, which would not have happened without the courage and vision of our colleague Kim Pate.

The Edmonton Institution for Women opened in 1995 in the wake of the events in Kingston — just after the Arbour inquiry began its work. Its new open campus facility, where women lived in homelike cottages instead of cells, was supposed to represent a more humane and rehabilitative institution.

That was more than 30 years ago, and the last two times I visited the facility with Senator Pate, I was shocked to see how run down and ill repaired the living quarters had become. I was told, and I could see, that there was a huge infrastructure deficit and that there was no budget to do the badly needed renovations.

I actually filed an access to information and privacy request about the state of disrepair, and, years later, I have yet to receive a single document responding to my request.

Today, I want to ask you this: Can you undertake, on my behalf and on behalf of this whole chamber, to provide a full and proper report as to the nature of the needed repairs at the Edmonton Institution for Women and a breakdown of what those repairs might cost?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): It would be my pleasure to bring the question to the minister and to provide you with an answer. However, I have been informed that, six days ago, Minister Anandasangaree announced $4.7 million in federal support for the "Woman of Inner strength" project, led by the Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society in Ontario. I don't see why they wouldn't make such a commitment for other installations elsewhere in Canada, but I will certainly raise your question with the minister, and I will get back to you with an answer.

OVERREPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN PRISONS

Hon. Paula Simons: In 1996, the year the Arbour report came out, 23% of female offenders in Canada's federal institutions were identified as Aboriginal. The last time I was at the Edmonton Institution for Women, a full 70% of the inmates were Indigenous, even though less than 7% of Albertans identify as Indigenous.

Recent government legislation, such as Bill C-14, risks making the crisis of overrepresentation even worse. What substantive steps is your government going to take to reduce the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous women?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Simons, I know that you were there yesterday when the Minister of Justice was at the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, and he broadly answered that question. He is very well aware of the overpopulation and overrepresentation of Indigenous women in the system.

The government is aware of that reality, but justice outcomes are often shaped long before someone enters the justice system, and that is why the government is investing in housing and other programs to —

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Hon. Bernadette Clement: Senator Moreau, I stand with my colleagues on this anniversary of the Arbour report. I want to highlight one portion of the report's recommendations:

> . . . that in programming, priority be given to the development of work programs that (i) have a vocational training component; (ii) provide a pay incentive; or (iii) constitute a meaningful occupation;

and

> . . . that the first priority . . . be the release and reintegration of women in custody.

Recently, as Correctional Service Canada is making cuts to its budget — to librarians, community employment coordinators and jobs for incarcerated people — we're hearing that meaningful work opportunities at Grand Valley Institution for Women are being cut, specifically in their horticulture program.

Senator Moreau, I'm worried that, 30 years after the Arbour report, we're still not adequately preparing women for reintegration. In fact, we're moving away from methods that have been proven to work.

When are we going to get back to true rehabilitation?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for the question.

The government knows that federally sentenced women have unique needs and that impacts the way they respond to correctional programs.

The government provides a gender- and trauma-informed approach to address the specific needs of women, with programs focused on how an individual's behaviour can influence situations and relationships. Correctional programming offers a continuum of care from admission to sentence expiry. The goal is for individuals to learn to live a crime-free life and successfully reintegrate into the community. Their reintegration is the fundamental goal of the correctional system, and the government remains committed to their successful reintegration into the community, for both the general women's population and the Indigenous population as well.

[*Translation*]

Senator Clement: Thank you, Senator Moreau.

[*English*]

JUSTICE

CANADA'S BLACK JUSTICE STRATEGY

Hon. Bernadette Clement: You have heard me talk about the Black Justice Strategy many times in this place. The Arbour report didn't make any recommendations with regard to Black people and their needs, but the Arbour report and the Black Justice Strategy have some things in common: Smart people took the time to provide great recommendations for us to do better, and these are reports requiring action.

How is the government going to do better to implement recommendations made to improve the well-being of people in the custody of Correctional Service Canada?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): In February 2025, the Government of Canada published *Toward Transformative Change: an Implementation Plan for Canada's Black Justice Strategy*. Notably, the government made a 10-year commitment to necessary, on-the-ground, transformative change in order to reduce the overrepresentation of Black people in the criminal justice system, including victims of crime.

The commitment is concretized by five pillars of action, backed by $276 million in government spending.

INDIGENOUS JUSTICE STRATEGY

Hon. Paul (PJ) Prosper: Senator Moreau, in November 1996, the Auditor General of Canada released a report on the reintegration of offenders. The report notes that:

> Correctional Service Canada has two main responsibilities — the incarceration of offenders and their safe reintegration into the community.

The Indigenous Justice Strategy was unveiled on March 10, 2025, and it clearly outlines the need for stable, long-term investments for Section 81 healing lodges to safely reintegrate First Nations people into their communities.

Senator, when will your government announce the stable, long-term investments they reference throughout the justice strategy?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, Senator Prosper, for the question.

The government is aware that Indigenous people in Canada face unfair treatment and are overrepresented in the justice system. This must change. That is why, after collaboration and engagement with Indigenous partners, rights-holders and community leaders, the government released the Indigenous Justice Strategy, which lays the foundation for meaningful, long-term reform.

To answer your question directly, I do not have a specific date, but there is a general commitment on the part of the government to back that strategy and to ensure that we are addressing this issue meaningfully.

• (1410)

Senator Prosper: Am I correct in thinking that it's still being worked on and we're awaiting further announcements on funding and progress?

Senator Moreau: Yes, the implementation is under way. Government departments are working directly with Indigenous communities to set priorities and design the Indigenous-led approach outlined in the strategy.

Last week, the government announced $4.7 million for the Thunder Women Healing Lodge Society to support Indigenous women reintegrating from federal and provincial correctional systems.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

INCREASING OVERREPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN CANADIAN PRISONS

Hon. Michèle Audette: My question is for my esteemed colleague, Senator Moreau.

The government has not fulfilled its commitment to eliminate the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in prisons by 2025. It is now 2026.

Unfortunately, Indigenous women, who were the focus of Justice Arbour's findings in 1996, remain the fastest-growing segment of the prison population.

Call for Justice 5.14 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls for action to address the over-incarceration of Indigenous women and the practices within the justice system that contribute to it.

With that in mind, Senator Moreau, now that it is 2026, what is the government's timeline for reducing the criminalization of victims of violence and promoting the reintegration of Indigenous women into their communities?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): The truth is, reducing the overrepresentation of a particular group, such as Indigenous women, in prison is not a problem that can be solved overnight.

The government is firmly committed to solving this problem. You referred to Justice Arbour's report, which contained 14 recommendations.

Recommendation 4(a), which sought to create the position of Deputy Commissioner for Women, was fulfilled; Amy Jarrette currently holds that position.

Recommendation 7(a) sought to make the healing lodge available to Indigenous women. I don't believe you were at the Legal Affairs Committee meeting yesterday, but the Minister of Justice indicated that work must be done upstream. That's what the government is doing as part of the strategy by investing in housing, health and Indigenous businesses to prevent members of these communities from becoming involved in the justice and prison systems.

Senator Audette: I agree with you, but the rate is extremely high right now.

I'd like you to ask the government the following question: Is the Centre Gilles Jourdain in Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam on the list? You may not be able to answer that today, but I'm asking you to ask the minister that question. Is that centre one of the ones that could be subsidized? We are talking about people who have been incarcerated in federal and provincial prisons. I would like that centre to be on the list and to be considered an organization.

Senator Moreau: The government is well aware that infrastructure requires investments in many cases.

I answered a question from our colleague Senator Simons earlier regarding a specific case in Edmonton. I can ask about the case you have raised, but the government does have genuine intentions in this regard. The investments announced by the Minister of Public Safety just a few days ago for a centre in Ontario demonstrate the government's willingness to move in that direction.

[*English*]

OVERREPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN PRISONS

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: This question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Following her investigation of the illegal strip-searching and lengthy segregation of Indigenous women and their transfer to a predominantly men's prison, 30 years ago, former Justice Arbour recommended the placement of limits on the use of segregation and noted the need for correctional accountability and remedies for prisoners whose rights were violated. These issues continue, and the overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls is now far worse and increasing.

What plans is the government implementing to address these issues?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): As I mentioned to your colleague Senator Audette, we cannot solve the issue overnight. However, the government is committed to doing so, specifically with respect to overrepresentation of Indigenous women in the system.

The government has taken multiple actions and concrete steps to improve conditions and oversight in federal corrections, including reform of administrative segregation, increased external oversight and expanded support for mental health rehabilitation. The government also continues to invest in Indigenous-led solutions, such as healing lodges and community-based reintegration programs, recognizing these approaches are essential to breaking cycles of incarceration and improving outcomes for Indigenous women.

Senator McCallum: Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action 30 was accepted by the government, but 10 years on, the massive overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples continues. When and how will Canada meet its commitments and address these issues?

Senator Moreau: As I mentioned, the reality is that justice outcomes are often shaped long before someone enters the system. That is why, as a global strategy, the government is acting in advance of Indigenous or other communities entering the justice system.

This is why we are investing in housing, child welfare and entrepreneurship. For Indigenous communities alone, the government has committed $2.8 billion for Indigenous housing and $1.5 billion for child care —

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, Senator Moreau. Thirty seconds go by quickly.

[*English*]

HEALTH

SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Government leader, a new peer-reviewed study published in the journal *Addiction* has confirmed what Conservatives have been raising for years: Supervised consumption sites are not the solution for Canadians struggling with addiction.

The study found that the closure of such sites did not lead to an increase in medical emergencies or deaths. In fact, it found that closures were associated with more individuals seeking addiction treatment.

For decades, Liberals have supported this policy despite spiking drug use and overdose deaths across the country. Leader, in light of this evidence, is your government prepared to re-evaluate its position on supervised consumption sites?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Speaking generally, the government is committed to working with provinces across the country to support communities with responsive programs that support public health and safety with respect to the issue that you raise today.

It is an important issue, and the government wants to work with provinces to ensure we find solutions to this situation.

Senator Martin: Senator Moreau, in my home province of British Columbia alone, more than 18,000 lives have been lost to drug overdoses over the past decade, and since 2016, unregulated drug toxicity has remained the leading cause of unnatural death, creating an ongoing public health emergency.

Leader, these sites cannot operate without explicit authority from your government. Will you listen to the science and commit to Canadians that no more sites will be authorized to operate in the future?

Senator Moreau: Senator Martin, you raise a very important issue. Yesterday, we had the health minister here in this chamber, and she committed herself and the government as a whole to working with provinces to find solutions to this very important situation.

PUBLIC SAFETY

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO CERTAIN EVENTS AT THE PRISON FOR WOMEN IN KINGSTON

Hon. Kim Pate: Senator Moreau, in her report examining the mass rights violations of women in prison, former Justice Arbour affirmed that when someone is sentenced to prison, separation from the community is the punishment. Further punitive measures must be subject to the rule of law.

She recommended:

> If illegalities, gross mismanagement or unfairness in the administration of a sentence renders the sentence harsher than that imposed by the court, a reduction of the period of imprisonment may be granted . . .

When Charter and human rights violations occur in prisons pre-sentencing, they result in sentence reductions or even stays of charges. When they occur after sentencing, there is no meaningful remedy.

• (1420)

This gap in the law has persisted for decades and undermines the integrity of the rule of law. What concrete measures is the government taking to redress this and implement the Arbour remedy?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Generally speaking, the Arbour report was a defining moment in exposing systemic failures in the treatment of women in federal custody, and I agree with the premises of your question.

That is the reason for some implementation of the recommendations of the report, like Recommendation 4 for a Deputy Commissioner for Women, Recommendation 7 for healing lodges for women, and investment to make sure that the infrastructure is maintained.

There are many questions today concerning the Arbour report. There is a serious commitment on the part of this government to make sure that the recommendations are taken into account. It is a long process, but it is a very serious commitment of our government.

OVERREPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN PRISONS

Hon. Kim Pate: Thank you very much, Senator Moreau. As you know, government data indicates that 96% of women in structured intervention units are Indigenous. Most of them are struggling with mental health issues. Isolation prevents women from completing their correctional plan, delays access to parole and means they spend a longer time in prison. As you have heard from our colleagues, the government missed its Truth and Reconciliation Commission commitment deadline, and right now we are looking at legislative measures that will likely —

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

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator Pate, I know that you were present yesterday when the Minister of Justice was at the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, and you raised those important issues with him.

He made a commitment. He knows that we have to work upstream to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous women, for instance, in prison, and that is why the global strategy of the government is working to address the issue before people enter the justice system. I'm sure that working in the committee, you will —

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF CANADA
FOR THE REGIONS OF QUEBEC

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Senator Moreau, the mandate of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is to support long-term economic development across the province, with particular attention to regions facing slower growth or limited employment opportunities. According to the Main Estimates for 2026-27, the agency is expected to receive nearly $416 million in funding.

At a time of significant geopolitical and economic uncertainty, marked by industrial transformation and shifting global value chains, the agency has identified support for SMEs and communities as a key priority.

In this context, how will the federal government ensure that regions across Quebec are equipped to adapt to these changes? What concrete measures will be implemented to support local and regional economies and help them prosper during this period of transition?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you. This is why the government is establishing targeted measures and making flexible investments to help Quebec's regions to adapt, compete and grow in the geopolitical situation you were describing.

The government is supporting small- and medium-sized businesses in boosting productivity, adopting new technologies and integrating into evolving global value chains, ensuring they are well positioned for this period of industrial transformation. This includes concrete measures, like the Regional Tariff Response Initiative, helping businesses respond to U.S. trade pressures by raising productivity and diversifying markets.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that answer.

The agency acknowledges in its Departmental Plan that the challenges facing Quebec's businesses and regions could dilute the overall impact of its interventions.

Given ongoing trade tensions and uncertainty, how will the agency ensure greater flexibility and agility in its programs and interventions? More specifically, how will it position Quebec to seize emerging opportunities and strengthen its competitive advantage?

Senator Moreau: Flexibility is the most important word here. That's why flexibility is the core of how Canada's economic development operates. For example, the Regional Defence Investment Initiative actively integrates Quebec businesses into domestic and international defence supply chains, strengthening both resilience and competitiveness.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

SUPPORT FOR FARMERS AND PRODUCERS

Hon. Todd Lewis: Senator Moreau, the Government of Canada recently announced plans for a national food security strategy. I've heard concerns from farmers that measures to artificially constrain food prices, such as price fixing or mandated price caps, end up passing costs down to farmers, who are already struggling to maintain profitability during these turbulent times.

How will the government ensure that this strategy supports Canadian farmers by enhancing resilience in Canadian agri-food supply chains and, by extension, enhancing Canada's food security?

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate): That is a very important question. Food security and affordability are a real concern, and the government recognizes that blunt measures like artificial price controls can risk shifting pressure onto farmers and producers, who are already facing significant challenges. That is why it is not the way the government wants to operate.

The government's approach is targeted. The government is strengthening competition in the grocery sector, supporting Canadian farmers and investing in the resilient food supply. At the same time, the government is providing direct affordability supports to Canadians, including the increase in the GST tax credit — Bill C-4 — rather than distorting the market in ways that could harm farmers. The government is very aware of the pressure on farmers and wants to ensure that the programs it provides will not harm them even more.

Senator Lewis: Thank you. Producers are pleased that there is recognition of the important role that food security plays for all Canadians. Canada is blessed with abundant resources in our agri-food industry. The entire value chain will continue to provide a safe, reliable and affordable food supply for not only Canadians but our international customers as well.

Please ensure that the strategy goes forward, and we look forward to participating in it.

Senator Moreau: I certainly will, Senator Lewis. It's important. I can tell you that, to lower the cost of food production, the government is introducing immediate expensing for building greenhouses. I know for farmers that is very important. This allows producers to fully write off greenhouses acquired on or after November 4, 2025, and that becomes available for use before 2030.

[*Translation*]

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

STRENGTHENING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM AND BORDERS BILL

MESSAGE FROM COMMONS—AMENDMENT, CONCURRENCE WITH A SENATE AMENDMENT AND DISAGREEMENT WITH A SENATE AMENDMENT

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I have the honour to inform the Senate that a message has been received from the House of Commons which reads as follows:

Thursday, March 26, 2026

EXTRACT, —

That a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint Their Honours that, in relation to Bill C-12, An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures, the House:

proposes that amendment 2 made by the Senate be amended by replacing the text of paragraph 75.1(3)(c) with the following: "the proportion of refugee protection claimants referred to in paragraph (b) who exited and re-entered Canada after the day of entry referred to in paragraph 101(1)(b.1) of that Act;";

agrees with amendment 3 made by the Senate; and

respectfully disagrees with amendment 1 because the amendment would remove Canadian citizens and permanent residents from the clear and transparent information-sharing framework established by Part 5 of the bill, because information-sharing relating to these individuals already occurs under existing statutory authorities and would continue to occur in their absence from the framework established by Bill C-12, as the purpose of Part 5 is to replace the current patchwork of authorities with a single coherent regime that establishes consistent partners, clearly defined purposes, and modern privacy safeguards, and furthermore, because excluding Canadian citizens and permanent residents from these provisions would perpetuate existing inefficiencies, undermine modernization initiatives within the immigration system, and reduce the transparency and accountability that Bill C-12 intends to strengthen.

ATTEST

Eric Janse

Clerk of the House of Commons

Honourable senators, when shall this message be taken into consideration?

(On motion of Senator Moreau, message placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration later this day.)

• (1430)

[*English*]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 4-12(3), I would like to inform the Senate that as we proceed with Government Business, the Senate will address the items in the following order: third reading of Bill C-15, followed by the consideration of the message from the House of Commons concerning Bill C-12, followed by third reading of Bill C-23, followed by third reading of Bill C-24, followed by second reading of Bill S-5, followed by second reading of Bill C-13, followed by Motion No. 63, followed by all remaining items in the order that they appear on the Order Paper.

BUDGET 2025 IMPLEMENTATION BILL, NO. 1

THIRD READING—DEBATE

Hon. Sandra Pupatello moved third reading of Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

She said: Honourable senators, I am delighted to stand here again and to address Bill C-15 in this third reading. If it feels as though we've been talking about this budget bill for some time, it's mostly because we have. It has gone on for quite some time.

[*Translation*]

The Minister of Finance and National Revenue tabled his budget last November. When the budget implementation bill was tabled in the other place, we began our pre-study, fully aware that a bill of such magnitude, as evidenced by its 600 pages, required from us that we take time to examine it properly, to ask the necessary questions and to ensure its final content. Bill C-15 was referred to 11 committees for pre-study.

[*English*]

I'm not sure if that's a record.

[*Translation*]

The Standing Senate Committee on National Finance did the bulk of the work and reported back to this chamber after months of study and numerous comments.

[*English*]

So what was in this bill? It was laid out in five parts. Part 1 dealt with innumerable tax measures. We have listed them many times, for individuals and businesses, including these examples: a temporary tax credit for personal support workers totalling $1,100 per year; expanding the list of items included in the Disability Supports Deduction, items that can be, in addition, used to enhance work opportunities; exempting the Canada Disability Benefit from income. Some benefits to businesses include the introduction of a productivity super-deduction, a set of enhanced tax incentives covering all new capital investments; and supercharging investment in research and development by enhancing the Scientific Research and Experimental Development, or SR&ED, tax credit. Examples to further support a clean economy include a clean electricity investment tax credit, as well as enhancing the suite of existing Clean Economy Investment Tax Credits to further support investments in clean technologies, clean-tech manufacturing and carbon capture, utilization and storage.

Some were really self-explanatory, like the elimination of the underused housing tax. The amount collected did not warrant having that tax in place.

Other measures are a bit more convoluted, like ". . . removing the tax-indifferent investor exception to the synthetic equity arrangement anti-avoidance rule . . . ." I'll wait for the Q & A on that one.

[*Translation*]

Part 2 repeals the Digital Services Tax Act and its regulations and makes the necessary amendments to other related legislation. Part 3 contains additional tax changes related to the tax on select luxury items. Part 4 amends the First Nations Goods and Services Tax Act to allow Indigenous governments, if they so choose, to impose their own sales tax on certain items sold on their reserves or settlement lands.

[*English*]

Division 1 of Part 5 enacts the high-speed rail network act. This saw a great deal of interest by the committee and certainly by members of the public. Alto, the public company in charge of it, was called before the Finance Committee. The Transport Committee studied it in depth as well, as did many others. Many questions were put to officials, especially around the expropriation language in the bill.

[*Translation*]

Two weeks ago, the Minister of Transport, Steve MacKinnon, appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and also spoke at length about the oversight mechanisms necessary for the proper management of this vast, multi-year project.

[*English*]

Part 5, perhaps, is where committee members and witnesses appearing before committee spent most of their time.

There are elements to combat finance fraud, requiring banks to have policies and procedures to detect and prevent consumer-targeted fraud; enhancing access to funds deposited by cheque; helping credit unions grow and compete by making it easier to enter the federal framework; completing the consumer-driven banking legislative framework; creating a regulated space for stablecoins to support innovation but also to build trust in digital payments.

I congratulate the Banking Committee for a tremendous amount of work in this area.

Importantly, this bill also has measures to help renew the public workforce by offering an early-retirement incentive program to help attrition drive workforce reductions.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to return to the budget presentation from last November. The government set some key objectives for itself, including leveraging our strengths and resources, supporting a skilled workforce, building our nation, investing in technology, transitioning to a low-carbon economy and making housing affordable.

[*English*]

There is also leverage to increase defence spending to grow our economy, like the use of the Buy Canadian policy; unify our economy and eliminate internal trade barriers; diversify our trade; and bring all of that together with a policy framework to drive investment by incenting business investment and creating a more efficient and competitive marketplace.

So, pick any measure that we see in the budget bill, and it will relate back to these five core actions and outcomes in the *Canada Strong* Budget 2025 document.

Take the $182 million over three years for defence to establish sovereign space launch capability — a favourite of mine. It is critical for the independence of Canada's telecommunications ability. This is building Canada in so many ways. As I mentioned at committee on Tuesday, 14 years ago, a national *Aerospace Review* called that out and identified that lack of space launch capability as a deficiency in our sovereignty. Imagine being beholden to other nations or private sector interests for the launch of our own telecom satellites.

[*Translation*]

For those interested in the economy, the budget sets out six priority areas aimed at addressing major strategic challenges through a renewed industrialization of Canada. These include the new Major Projects Office, the Canada Homes Agency and the new Defence Industrial Strategy.

[*English*]

There is also the Buy Canadian Policy; Climate Competitiveness Strategy; and our trade diversification strategy.

This approach is being supported by two fiscal anchors — balancing operating spending with revenues by 2028-29 and maintaining a declining deficit-to-GDP ratio — and by catalyzing $500 billion in new private sector investments over the next five years to create that cycle of investment and economic growth.

Much has been said about Canada's financial status here in this chamber. Budget 2025 outlines the size of Canada's government at $508 billion in program spending.

• (1440)

Let's go back in time for a minute.

In 2007-08, there was no deficit. That government was handed no deficit by the government coming before it, the Paul Martin government.

In 2009-10 that deficit was a whopping $55 billion from 0. Yes, there was an economic recession in those years. Support was required for people and business, not in all sectors but in many sectors, especially in my province. The government of that day went from a balanced budget to a $55 billion deficit in one year, with a total program spend of $236 billion. So the contrast is that it was, indeed, a smaller government at that time.

In 2020-21 — we all know what was happening then — the deficit was $327 billion. Why? Everyone needed support — every sector across all of the provinces — in those years. We supported businesses, we kept companies afloat, and we helped people save their homes.

The deficit projected in 2025-26 is $78 billion, with a total projected program spend of $502 billion. The context is really important here. This is at a time of global trade wars, unpredictable policies abroad harming investment in Canada and support that's required in virtually every trading sector in every province. The severity of economic risk today is easily tenfold compared to 2008. Context is really important.

I am certain that you also support the government's initiative of the comprehensive expenditure review destined to find $60 billion in savings over five years. Yes, context is important there, too. When we throw around deficit numbers, we need to know what is happening in our economy at the time.

It is true; Canada and one other EU country, Germany, have the strongest net debt-to-GDP ratio of all of the G7 countries.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the National Finance Committee. It was my first time attending all these meetings, where witnesses provided testimony on various aspects of Bill C-15.

[*English*]

Our chair, Senator Carignan, took care to see that all committee members were happy, and by leading a very able staff at the National Finance Committee, Sara Gajic very aptly co-ordinated every aspect of a busy schedule with a demanding chair, I might add.

I want to acknowledge the 16 years that Senator Elizabeth Marshall spent at the National Finance Committee.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Pupatello: Now, she did tell me that she is still following the committee and following the chamber, so I hope that she will hear us today as well.

She used her fine auditor skills to strip down budgets to their core, putting officials on their heels and cleverly asking questions when she likely already knew the answers. I'm glad that I had at least several months of overlap with her.

Congratulations, Senator Marshall. You have cut a path through your years in the Senate that will be very difficult for others to follow.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Pupatello: Senators, I want to thank you for your kind attention to this deliberation of Bill C-15. It becomes the backbone legislation for much of the work of the government as a whole. This bill is the backbone that accompanies the budget *Canada Strong*. I look forward to seeing many of these measures come to fruition.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Senator Gignac, do you have a question?

Hon. Clément Gignac: Yes. I would like to congratulate the bill's sponsor. I would also like to congratulate her on the quality of her French, which could serve as an inspiration to the president of Air Canada.

Maybe you could tell him how it's done.

The Quebec finance minister sent a letter to his federal counterpart on February 19 to express his concerns about the open banking system. Do the amendments that were made in the House of Commons and the discussions that followed mean that Quebec no longer opposes the part of Bill C-15 that deals with the open banking system? Do you have any new information on that?

Senator Pupatello: Unfortunately, I'm very disappointed that I don't have any new information on that. However, I'm sure there have been many discussions since then, because as soon as the bill passes, we'll move on to the next step, which will be to determine how Canada can gain access to this new banking zone. I hope your upcoming discussions go well.

[*English*]

Hon. Rebecca Patterson: Honourable senators, before I begin my remarks, I want to let senators know that I will not be moving an amendment to Bill C-15 at the conclusion of my speech today. In conversations that I have been having with the Government Representative's Office, GRO; the bill's sponsor, Senator Pupatello; and the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I have agreed to raise my concerns in speaking to Bill C-15 and to also send a letter requesting further information and clarity about the items that I will speak about momentarily. That letter has been sent to the Government Representative here in the Senate, Senator Moreau, and, with your indulgence, I will read the letter into the record.

> Senator Moreau,
>
> I am writing today concerning Division 19 of Part 5 of Bill C-15, *An Act to Implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025*. I have specific concerns regarding Clauses 372 to 375, inclusive, of Bill C-15 which affects vulnerable veterans who live in long term care facilities.
>
> Clauses 372 and 374 grants the Governor-in-Council the power to make regulations to define a "*province*" to the exclusion of the three territories for the purposes of any provision of the *Veterans Health CareRegulations*. This is in contrast to Section 35 of the *Interpretation Act* which expressly defines a "*province*" as including the three territories. Clauses 373 and 375 seeks to apply this new and extraordinary definition retroactively to 01 April 1993 and 15 July 1998 respectively.
>
> Myself and others, including the Veterans Ombud, are concerned this will unduly disadvantage already vulnerable veterans who live in long term care facilities if territorial rates are excluded from the calculation of the rate that veterans must pay for accommodations and meals in long term care.

As you know, this is a complex formula.

> This is because territorial rates for long term care can be lower than those set by the various provincial governments.
>
> As per my discussion with the Bill's sponsor, Senator Pupatello, I would like to request a response from the Minister of Veterans Affairs providing clarification on the following issues which have not been clearly articulated by officials to date:
>
> What is the rationale for the change in the definition found in Clauses 372 and 374, and how does this benefit veterans; and

Why in Clauses 373 and 375 is the definition being applied retroactively going back over thirty years, and how does this benefit veterans?

Additionally, in testimony during the pre-study of Bill C-15, Senators learned that for the past thirty plus years the Department of Veterans Affairs has already been excluding the territories when calculating the rates that veterans pay for accommodations and meals in long term care, absent the legislative authority to do so contained in Bill C-15. Of concern to myself, the Chair, National Elder Law Section of the Canadian Bar Association, and the Veterans Ombud, is that this administrative practice over the past thirty-three years may have impacted negatively on veterans, hurting them financially when they are already vulnerable.

Therefore, I would also like the Minister of Veterans Affairs to address:

Why the department has historically excluded the territorial rates in their calculations of this benefit, contrary to the express provision of the *Interpretation Act*, and what benefit there was to veterans in doing so,

How many living veterans will there be in long term care facilities at the time Bill C-15 comes into force,

Up to the coming into force of Bill C-15, how much were those veterans paying, and how would those amounts change if territorial rates were included in the calculations; and

What are estimated costs to the Crown, should it consider making an *ex-gratia* payment to those affected veterans, if territorial rates had been included in the calculation of the rate that veterans must pay for accommodations and meals in long term care.

Maintaining the trust of the veteran community is critical to ensure the confidence of these vulnerable veterans. For these reasons, I look forward to the Minister's response no later than the first week of June 2026, in language that is clear, concise and understandable, not just for myself and my fellow Senators, but also for the veteran community.

Sincerely —

— yours truly.

• (1450)

As you know, I have had the privilege of serving — you hear it all the time, but it was an enormous honour to serve alongside Canadians who have consistently put service to Canada above themselves and put their lives on the line for what we value most. I tell you this today as I rise to speak to Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025. I specifically want to address Division 19 of Part 5 of the bill. It will help provide some granularity on the letter that I just read to you.

Division 19 amends three acts: the Pension Act, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act and the Department of Veterans Affairs Act. While I will offer some comments on the amendments to the first act, the focus of my speech will be about the changes to the Department of Veterans Affairs Act, which affects the accommodation and meals rates that are charged to Canadian Armed Forces veterans living in long-term care.

While I am a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, I want to be clear that I do not receive any veterans' benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada at this time. The division of the budget implementation act that I'm about to address does not affect me personally. It deals with pensions and rates that veterans pay if they reside in long-term care. As you can see, perhaps by me standing here today, I do not live in long-term care.

All that to be said, colleagues, I want to assure you that this is not a personal matter in how it affects me, but it is a significant issue for a group of vulnerable veterans, and I hope it is for all of you as well.

Canadian veterans have earned the right to demand consistency, equity and justice in their benefits provided for in law and regulation. Those veterans' benefits go beyond what is provided within provincial and territorial programs and regulations, as we cannot forget that veterans are members of these systems and also eligible for those benefits and support.

As parliamentarians, we have a duty to listen, learn and consult with Canadians. While we do not have constituencies like our colleagues in the other place, we do have communities that we speak up for — they're often minority voices, whether they be Indigenous Peoples, racialized Canadians, official language minority speakers or, in my case, those who serve in the Canadian military, those veterans who see their service in the rear-view mirror and their families.

Why should this matter to you as parliamentarians?

Those who serve or who have served Canada, whether it be across the world or here at home, have literally signed up to put their lives on the line for Canada and for the safety and security of all Canadians. They serve Canada with the expectation of unlimited liability.

This is the first note to help you understand why this is an issue for veterans.

This means that they accept that their service may ultimately result in suffering or injury or they may even be ordered to their death. Those who were fortunate enough to make it home may or may not have suffered service-related injuries. And other former Canadian Armed Forces members who complete their military service to Canada may also be suffering from physical and mental health injuries as a result of exposure to innately dangerous situations faced during training, operational deployments, et cetera.

Please know that members of the Canadian Armed Forces are not covered under any provincial workers' compensation programs because who the heck would insure somebody who steps into harm's way? That leaves the federal government responsible for their care, support and benefits while they are serving and after their service.

This is what makes a veteran unique. And I will talk exclusively about Canadian Armed Forces veterans. We eventually need to have another conversation about Royal Canadian Mounted Police veterans.

This is something I think about every day when I approach my continued service here in the Senate. My goal is to be a voice for the voiceless.

Why do I stand before you today to debate components of Bill C-15? When Bill C-15 first came before us last year by way of a pre-study, Division 19 of Part 5 caught my attention. On December 8, 2025, I attended a meeting of the National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs Committee, dealing with that portion of the budget bill. At that meeting, I learned through official testimony and witness testimony that the government was amending the legislation and regulations affecting veteran pensions and the accommodation and meals charge to clarify the rates paid and charged to veterans, whatever their case may be.

In her opening remarks, Julie Drury, Acting Director General of Policy and Research at Veterans Affairs Canada, said:

> Bill C-15 also proposes amendments to the Pension Act, the Veterans Well-being Regulations, the Department of Veterans Affairs Act and the Veterans Health Care Regulations.
>
> With respect to the Pension Act, the amendments clarify that the term "province" does not include Yukon, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut for the purposes of the annual adjustment calculations for disability pensions and related benefits.

I am not a lawyer — and I look to my colleagues who are — but I thought I knew what a province was in Canada, and it included our fabulous territories.

Colleagues, section 35 of the Interpretation Act, which would have been in effect in the absence of other clarifying legislation, defines "province" as the following:

> ***province*** means a province of Canada, and includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut . . . .

But it would seem that the government, specifically Veterans Affairs Canada, did not and does not feel the same. You can appreciate my confusion and that of a number of our colleagues that day. You can see this just by looking at the transcript of the questions we were asking.

In response, Nathan Svenson, Senior Director of Disability and Health Care Policy at Veterans Affairs Canada, said:

> The entire premise is looking back at the intent and the original design of the program, and there was a lack of clarity in the legislation, so the amendments that were brought in are simply clarifying this is how the calculation has been done and will continue to be done, and that's why we state that there's no change in the value of the benefits to CAF veterans.

It's clear as mud, right? Yes.

We are being asked to approve changes to clarify the definition of "province," which will invariably affect the benefits that veterans receive, but we're also being told there will be ". . . no change in the value of the benefits to CAF veterans."

I have since come to learn that it is not unusual that there be laws passed by Parliament where definitions vary for a specific reason from those found in the Interpretation Act, and I accept this. However, what are the reasons behind amending in this instance, other than correcting an administrative error in how things have always been done? Of course, we know this is Parliament's right. This is why Bill C-15 is the right place to put this clarification.

However, we have to also consider that it may do a disservice to Canadians who are looking for consistency from Parliament and parliamentarians, especially in this instance because this definition impacts how we are dealing with some very vulnerable people. It also deals with benefits and pensions.

Not only does Division 19 of Part 5 amend the definition of "province" in the affected acts, it does so retroactively to 1993 because as per a follow-up letter from Veterans Affairs Canada to the committee chair:

> The amendments reflect the way the monthly Accommodation and Meals charge has been calculated since annual adjustments began in 1993. These amendments resolve any differences in how the calculations are interpreted and will avoid ambiguity going forward.

I can see how this makes sense going forward, but my question is: Can you retroactively correct your mistake by changing legislation? You can.

Colleagues, I have mentioned that it is the right of this Parliament — and those who came before and those who will come after — to pass legislation as it sees fit and not be bound, necessarily, by the decisions made by previous Parliaments so long as the bill is constitutional. However, I feel it is an affront to Canadians and, in this instance, to veterans — who are already suspicious of the system — that Parliament is reaching so far back into the past to change the law and regulations to meet the administrative actions that took place during the period in question.

It is no wonder that Veterans Ombud, Colonel (Ret'd) Nishika Jardine — who is a Governor-in-Council appointment, by the way — raises the issue of retroactivity in an open letter posted on their website and addressed to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. The Veterans Ombud said:

> Ultimately, it is clear to the Veteran community that Bill C-15 sections 373-375 are meant solely to correct an error made by the Department and to deny them compensation for the overcharge. VAC already faces growing reputational backlash over the manner in which it communicates with Canada's Veterans, their families and Survivors. I fear this retroactivity measure, if enacted, will only increase the deep distrust in Veterans Affairs Canada that, sadly, I hear about far too often.

• (1500)

My staff and I have been told, whether in testimony, briefings or in conversations, that the reason behind the retroactivity of this definition change is to fit the original intent of the law. I cannot put myself in the time and space of the members of this place or the other place to determine what the original intent was when adopting these acts and regulations initially — those three I discussed previously. Therefore, I cannot opine as to whether this was their intent. But I can, as a senator in the here and now, examine, debate and raise awareness from this point onward.

Senators, while I respect Parliament's right to enact legislation with different definitions and interpretations, I am still challenged. I referred to changes to the definition of "province," which are set to cover multiple acts and regulations. I will break this down a bit.

There are two key acts affected by this definition change that concern me. The first affects the Pension Act in clauses 363 to 370. This, if I understand it correctly, relates to a class-action settlement reached by the Department of Veterans Affairs and a number of veterans in the *Manuge v. Canada* case. It concerned the payment of pension benefits to veterans based on provincial rates and definitions.

Per the Library of Parliament's legislative summary, the courts ruled in favour of the plaintiffs, and as part of the settlement, the government was required to pay over $800 million to those affected veterans, dating back to 1985. As clauses 363 to 370 flow from that settlement, while important for me to share with you, they are being dealt with appropriately via various machineries of state accordingly and are well suited to be found in this budget implementation act, or BIA.

But here is the rub: The government, specifically the Department of Veterans Affairs, appears — I use the word "appears" deliberately here — to have taken the amended definition of "province," pursuant to the class-action settlement agreement, and for purposes of clarity, which I spoke to previously, will apply that definition to other veterans' benefit calculations found within the BIA.

You see, colleagues, the second change using this proposed definition applies to the Department of Veterans Affairs Act and the Veterans Health Care Regulations found in clauses 372 and 374. However, unlike the previous example, which impacts pension payments, these clauses affect the accommodation and meals charge benefit rates that are paid to veterans who live in long-term care in any province or territory of Canada.

Of course, clauses 373 and 375 would apply this new and extraordinary definition retroactively as far back as April 1, 1993.

While still a benefit, this is different from the pension benefits found in the earlier clauses. So when it comes to pension benefits, those benefits are paid to the veteran, cash in hand. With regards to accommodation and meals in long-term care, the calculation establishes which expenses are going to be out of pocket for the veteran occupying long-term care and which expenses will be covered in terms of accommodation and meals by Veterans Affairs Canada, or VAC, and it is paid directly to the facility in which the veteran lives.

For those who are wondering, yes, there is provincial and territorial rate-setting for beds. I'll use Ontario as an example. There is a base rate for an occupant, which still applies to military veterans because they are members of provinces and territories.

But to be clear, if you are a veteran who qualifies for and lives in long-term care in Canada, there is an additional, federally funded benefit program available to you because of your service to this country. The veteran is responsible for paying the amount determined by the calculation we just talked about, which is determined by Veterans Affairs out of pocket. This is what they pay.

I will make a side note here for any of us who know a lot about long-term care. Injured people in Canada tend to suffer higher rates of poverty, ill health, et cetera. They may go into long-term care and are very needy as they go in, so $300 a month makes a difference to someone going into long-term care because any expenses beyond that base rate that are attributable to meals and accommodation are paid directly to the long-term care facility — so it is not cash in hand. That in itself is not a problem. It is that base rate we are talking about. This is the benefit referred to by the clauses I just mentioned.

This benefit program is only available to eligible veterans, specifically if that veteran has a low income, and they have to have experienced a service-related disability, or from service to country, and they must also have a need for long-term care.

The manner in which the department sets the rate charged and paid by veterans is based in regulation on the lowest subsidized rate paid in any province across Canada. Why? It's because veterans are not seen as a provincial asset. They are seen as equity throughout Canada because equity throughout Canada is federal. That is where this came from.

I am going to talk about clause 33.1(4)(a) of the Veterans Health Care Regulations, which says:

> (a) the lowest monthly user charge for accommodation and meals permitted by a province, under section 19 of the Canada Health Act, on July 1 of the same year . . . .

This is why it matters to these veterans whether a territory is considered a province. These numbers are in open source, and they are estimates. This is what is circulating in the community and, I believe, through a CBC News article. Senator Anderson would be able to share some other interesting information.

For example, the Northwest Territories, per a recent CBC News story, has the lowest monthly rate at $976 per month for low-income persons living in long-term care facilities. But — and again this is from CBC News — in 2024, the rate used by Veterans Affairs Canada, or VAC, was that of Manitoba's monthly rate of $1,236.90 per month. That is a difference of $260 per month — this is your example — meaning that a veteran living in a long-term care facility was out of pocket $3,130 annually based on this rate differential.

Per VAC's own data that was provided to my office by the Office of the Veterans Ombud, as of February 2025, the department is supporting more than 1,800 veterans in long-term facilities in Canada right now.

Now, if we were to go back more than 30 years to the inception of this program, there would likely be many more. But people don't last very long in long-term care facilities. Their lifespan is not long, sadly.

To illustrate this point, I will go back to 2012, when VAC was funding long-term care residency for almost five times the 2025 number. And we are recruiting heavily for the Canadian Armed Forces now, and we have a future that we need to think about. This bill not only moves to exclude the territories in the definition of provinces on a go-forward basis, as the government has a right to, but as I mentioned, it would also go back retroactively 30 years, which, even according to our law clerk here, is quite extraordinary.

Officials at the committee testified that this is to retroactively cover what they called "an administrative error" in how they had been undertaking the accommodation and meals calculation since 1993. The officials claimed that the program was never intended to include territories as provinces when first enacted in 1993. That may be so, but the Interpretation Act existed at the time, which included territories in the absence of other clarification, which is in Bill C-15 now.

Far be it from me to try to determine what the government or Parliament intended in 1993. I never thought that I would become a parliamentarian back then, for sure. I never thought that I would be a veteran. All I knew then was that I was still serving in the deserts of Somalia at that point, that I was wearing a Canadian flag on my shoulder and that I was a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I didn't believe that this would be my future. Maybe it sounds like something very simple. The explanation may be that there were no homes in the territories when this was started in 1993, and that is okay. However, this has never been articulated to veterans.

This may be why territories have been excluded. But I believe that is a question best asked of the government by the document that I tabled before I started speaking. Trust me when I say this: I have asked these questions in writing with an expectation for a clear answer. I don't need to be told again, "It's clarification of framework legislation." There is not one veteran out there who understands or cares what that means.

This is why I say thank you for accepting these questions.

They have a right to understand the rationale behind it in clear and concise language that is meaningful to them. The reason is because this bill will pass; this bill should pass. But I hope I can share those responses with you soon because all of us, no matter where we come from in Canada, come across veterans, know veterans or maybe even have them in our families.

• (1510)

Senators, there is something else about applying the definition retroactively that I also found interesting. For me, this is information, but this retroactive clause would also cut the legs out from under another class-action lawsuit that is looking to be certified.

You see, there are presently three class actions being brought against the government related to veterans benefits, one of which is specific to the long-term care rates veterans pay, and it is called the *Estate of Gordon Allen and Stanley Broski v. His Majesty the King*. They haven't been certified yet. They have been put on hold pending this legislation. This class-action lawsuit has been paused. The presence of potential class actions, like I said, is for your information only, but you can imagine there are veterans who, believe it or not, will listen to this speech today and are wondering about this. This is why we need clear answers.

So why I am I sharing? I want to do this for illustrative purposes of the impact of the changes that will go ahead. The primary plaintiffs, the estate of Gordon Allen and Mr. Stanley Broski, have estimated their losses due to what they consider overcharging because of the exclusion of territories in the definition — it is the root of the calculation — at $7,261 and $26,194, respectively.

In material prepared for the class action, it has been estimated by the accounting firm KPMG, which is the firm handling the payout from that other settled pension suit I referred to earlier, that in 2008 the overcharging affected over 10,000 veterans — many of them have since passed, of course — or their estates. In that period between 2008 and 2025, the total loss with interest was approximately $246 million. Remember that these calculations are by private industry and that they are estimates. They are not even necessarily up to date. So I've actually asked, as one of my questions to the government, for them to provide the number of living veterans affected by this change, how those rates were calculated in the past and what the difference would be if we changed that calculation.

Many of the veterans who are affected are those whom Veterans Affairs Canada, VAC, would refer to as "frail veterans," because, as I said earlier and I will repeat, to qualify for this type of support, the veteran is either low income or experiences a service-related disability or health need for long-term care. In the latter case, that means they have a condition that affects their daily functioning and have risks of things like falling, injury and illness, requiring supervised care. Remember that for a frail, elderly person, falling may end their life, so putting them somewhere safe is critical.

Colleagues, while estimated numbers of affected veterans may seem low compared to the overall population of Canada at approximately 100,000, as per the law firm McInnes Cooper,

these are not only vulnerable Canadians; they're also people who put country before self and served in the Canadian Armed Forces to defend us all. After decades of office closures and being told they're asking for too much, how can we not speak out when there is an issue of concern?

After all, was it not Parliament, when enacting the Veterans Well-being Act, that said, and I quote from section 2.1 under "Purpose":

> The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfil the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

Colleagues, I want to be crystal clear. I am not talking about Parliament's right to enact or amend laws as they deem fit. This is how I feel about what I'm hearing and the people whom I help to represent. If Parliament decides to, for very good purposes, use a definition of a province that is different from what is found in the Interpretation Act, so be it. My concern is the government making changes that will retroactively apply such a definition that will potentially economically hurt already disadvantaged veterans.

As such, I wanted to put this on the record here today. But, given all of this, I do support the passage of Bill C-15, and I want to thank you for your attention.

Hon. Pat Duncan: Will Senator Patterson take a question?

Senator Patterson: I will.

Senator Duncan: Senator Patterson, I have to say thank you for your dedicated representation of veterans and Canada's Armed Forces. I believe all senators appreciate your efforts.

My question concerns the references you've noted in Bill C-15 regarding the territories. Are you aware, senator, that the long-term care facilities available in Canada's North — and I'm speaking specifically of the three territories — are all public facilities? The territories received formula funding in 1985. This funding worked like an equalization payment, and it allowed the territories, for the very first time, to budget and plan more than a year in advance.

The population over this time period — I'm speaking of the Yukon and, in part, the Northwest Territories — has changed vastly. It's no longer a transient population. People are retiring, and they're staying and living there for a long time. The very first long-term care facility outside of a hospital opened in Whitehorse in 2002. Residents with a Yukon health care card pay $40 a day for their care. I note that veterans are advised when they retire to transition to the provincial or territorial health care card.

Those who keep an eye on budgets would go, "Why are you only charging people $40 a day when, in a long-term care facility, it's clearly a very expensive cost?" The duly elected territorial governments have chosen to provide long-term care as publicly funded facilities. It is part of the public health care system.

We also have to note that development of a privately funded facility is simply not feasible when you have a very large land mass and a very sparse population.

With this information in hand, would you agree that the territories should not be included in this specific section that only applies to the provinces?

Senator Patterson: Thank you very much for the question. That is the type of clarity that I believe veterans deserve to hear: how those considerations were figured in and why, back in 1993 — because that's even earlier — they would not have included rates. I want to thank you for providing that information, and, while we don't know what was in their heads at the time, I think that is very good information for anybody who is listening. Thank you.

Hon. Krista Ross: Would Senator Patterson take a question?

Senator Patterson: Yes.

Senator Ross: Senator Patterson, first of all, thank you for your service and for your care and concern for all veterans. In your remarks, you read a letter and you made a specific request for a detailed, written reply from the minister. However, I'm interested to know, specifically: What is it that veterans, in simple terms, are seeking from the government in response to this letter and in response to this very complicated situation?

Senator Patterson: I will put some military into this. The bottom line up front is that they want to be clearly communicated with and to have explained to them why the decisions were made, number one.

Number two, it has been acknowledged that, going forward, this is the way it is. Their biggest concern is the retroactivity clause. They want to know they have not been disadvantaged — remember, perception is reality — by this calculation over the long term. This is why asking for clear, concise answers — there are many good technical answers, which is not what we're interested in here — will help them understand and give them the tools so that if someone wishes to move forward, they can. Thank you.

Hon. Percy E. Downe: Senator Patterson, as you may know, historically the Senate has been very reluctant to agree to retroactive legislation because it was always our position that it is not our job to fix mistakes made by departments. That appears to be what is happening here again, and some Canadians will suffer because of those mistakes made by the department.

Given you withdrew your amendment, do you have any indication from the minister or the government leader that action will be taken to protect those veterans?

Senator Patterson: I was able to speak directly with the Minister of Veterans Affairs. It is an interesting position to be in. I believe that's a very challenging portfolio to begin with. There is a lot of distrust. One of the key issues that they're having is around clarity of messaging and information passage.

• (1520)

So, while I cannot compel any government official to do anything, with this letter, I feel my trust will rest in their being true to their word to come back. If you notice the deadline that I have spoken about — and I've spoken with the ombud about this because I want to ensure we get a clear answer — the time has been given. I have to hope as a course of action in this case, but I have faith as well.

Also, they will have me on their tail. I would like to respectfully provide notice that I will be asking questions to ensure this documentation comes back. I hope I will have the support of my colleagues as well.

Hon. Scott Tannas: In your speech, Senator Patterson, you mentioned there was testimony at committee from the department that said there would be nothing here that would diminish the value for veterans. Yet when I listen to the rest of your speech, it appears that may or may not be the case. We're taking the government's word at face value. If it turns out through the truthful answer we receive that veterans are being damaged, then I would presume that this chamber, led by you, would want to revisit the fact that Parliament has been misled. Is that fair?

Senator Patterson: That is a very interesting comment, and that is very much one of the tools that we have, collectively as senators, for accountability.

I don't believe there was any malice in this. Sometimes, you can be in committee and ask questions, and it is quite exceptional to afterward find a group of senators who — as brilliant as this group is — looking stunned. We are all asking the same variation of the question. They usually say that if everyone is confused, it's probably not you.

Again, I do not believe there was any malice in it. When it comes to understanding what it means and breaking it down into small parts — and it is also the legal advisers at the Office of the Veterans Ombud who have clearly stated that, of course, there is no difference in benefits because you may have been using the wrong calculation. It's like saying, "I know I'm not a liar because I said —" However, that is not what I'm saying. Let me pick a different example: "I know I'm not on fire because I said so." Is that a better example?

I don't think there was any intent to mislead; there was nothing that they provided like that. However, if you get down to it and don't use the Interpretation Act — because the government has the right to do what it likes — but if you are not following, the Interpretation Act was in place. It stated clearly — and that was the calculation they were using, "province," which is the root of all of this. They were saying they weren't doing that, and of course there is no effect on benefits because they weren't doing that anyway. The question is this: Legislatively, should they have been doing that?

So that is where the rub is, where the trust is and why the retroactivity part is the biggest challenge for their advocates and the veterans themselves. I hope that is okay. I think it is about helping folks understand, including our departmental officials, that these complex calculations of this act this bounce off that.

One of the challenges for Veterans Affairs — and I can certainly have empathy for the minister and colleagues there — is there are multiple acts impacting everything they do, and it is complex. Again, that is not the veterans' fault.

I will return to what you said. In order for them to be able to see whether they have been treated fairly and justly, you need to do it honestly and say that it is retroactive because we have always done it this way. Going into what we asked in the letter — show us on paper that it was the fairest for veterans based on what is in the Veterans Well-being Act. Thank you.

Senator Downe: Senator Tannas's question and Senator Patterson's response motivate me to ask another question. There has been a long-time discrepancy between the words spoken in the chamber about how important veterans and their families are and the actions.

I have been here long enough that I remember when we did the New Veterans Charter. What happened was our then-leaders — former Prime Minister Martin, former opposition leader Harper and, I believe, former NDP leader Layton — were in Europe for a very moving ceremony. They decided on the plane flying back that they would immediately put in the New Veterans Charter because it would be so good for veterans and their families. They spent 30 seconds on it in the House of Commons. It came to the Senate, and let me tell you, colleagues, it was not our finest moment. We referred it to the next committee sitting, which was Finance. I happened to be on it at the time. We spent one meeting on it. We had Sean Bruyea, a veteran who suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome — I'm not telling any secrets here as he's made that public — expressing real concern about it. Everyone else assured us of how good it was going to be; the department assured us. We passed it. There was a one-hour speech in the Senate. We all thought we'd done wonderful work for veterans and their families.

Years later, the PBO did a study. Veterans were denied millions and millions of dollars that they would have received if we had not changed the rules. One of the main rules was a yearly pension as opposed to immediate disbursement for members.

So I caution, colleagues, that our nice words must be followed by action. Senator Patterson, my question is this: Were you aware of the New Veterans Charter and the problems that came up after the fact?

Senator Patterson: Yes, thank you. I most certainly was. I will expand on that.

We understood that the quickness with which it passed was to support veterans, but most of us only see veterans when we wheel them out on November 11 or they put their medals on. Veterans Affairs is commemoration; that is an important part of recognizing things that they do that you just can't imagine. It is

out of our context as Canadians to understand. You wheel them out, and that is being a veteran. But there is the hard work that goes with it, and it costs money.

It goes to the comment I made that was built into one of the acts, which says that it is to recognize service. Please keep in mind that if you were to go on holiday and were hit by a tsunami or war event, your insurance would be null and void. So when you actually do that for a living and come back — and apparently we all age and our bits and pieces get old and wear down and our injuries expand and become worse — there is nobody who will compensate you for that because you did it because of your job. It is your job's fault. Because you have to exclude, with unlimited liability, you can't be a veteran without being a member of the Canadian Armed Forces or the RCMP. Because you served with unlimited liability and have lost two legs, there is no workmen's compensation that will cover that or long-term disability like most of us know.

This costs money, and there is that duty of service. So I want to thank you for that comment because, while it is appreciated, the hardest part for veterans and veterans' benefits is hard lines. One of the other ones — like you said, one day it is a lump sum, and the intent was good. You can choose to take a lump sum, which a modern, younger veteran who can invest it might do well with, but there are other people who live paycheque to paycheque and need the stipend.

When some of these new acts came in, they broke the war in Afghanistan in half. So if you were injured on, for example, July 1, you could have the old program; but if you were injured on July 2, you had to take the new program whether you wanted it or not. So when we go through this legislative process, my hope is that we think of it as a continuity. It costs taxpayer money, in terms of pension and benefits and support, because it is not available anywhere else. At the end of the day, the one who will always be left behind is the veteran.

The other part is that, regardless of whether one is an RCMP veteran or a Canadian Armed Forces veteran, the one thing we do is put service before self. Sit down and shut up — that is what they have decided.

This is why, when we hear veterans rise up and start talking about things, while you can't get everything you want, I think we need to listen. That is really behind this. So thank you very much for your comment, and I feel very comfortable that we will all be thinking about these things moving forward.

Hon. Donna Dasko: Thank you, senators, for that very enlightening discussion, I really appreciate it.

• (1530)

Honourable senators, I rise today to draw your attention to a section of Bill C-15 which is easy to miss in this bill of over 600 pages. It is found in Part 5, Division 18, and it amends the Special Economic Measures Act, or SEMA, with the goal being to strengthen Canada's sanctions regime.

SEMA is Canada's principle legislation. It has been effective since 1992 for implementing economic measures and sanctions, such as imposing trade embargoes, freezing assets and controlling financial transactions in response to serious international threats.

Canada has been a leader in developing our sanctions regime since Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Soon after that invasion, Canada and other Western countries froze hundreds of billions of dollars in Russian state assets, as well as the private assets of oligarchs, such as planes, yachts and real estate. The bulk of the frozen state assets sit in Europe, with Belgium's Euroclear holding the largest share.

Soon after that, Canada took a much bolder leap. In the Budget Implementation Act, or BIA, of June 2022, the government amended SEMA to go beyond freezing the assets of sanctioned individuals and entities to permit the outright seizure and forfeiture of such assets. With this move, Canada became the first G7 nation with the power to not only freeze but also permanently seize and redistribute the assets of sanctioned individuals and entities.

Now, according to officials who testified on December 10, 2025, at the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and who responded to my follow-up questions, the current amendments to SEMA in Bill C-15 are motivated by the very same circumstances. The collective experience of Canada and our allies in dealing with Russian assets in the intervening years since 2022 has prompted these measures to strengthen our sanctions design.

Today, around €210 billion in Russian state assets remains frozen globally, and Euroclear, which is a Belgian financial securities depository, holds around €180 billion of these state assets. Euroclear has also reported roughly C$22 billion held in Canadian dollars.

According to experts, these Canadian-dollar assets are likely held in correspondent accounts in Canadian financial institutions, but little more is known about this Canadian component, even though we have made efforts many times to seek answers to this.

The government's amendments to SEMA are a welcome step. First, the Minister of Finance would have to be consulted on any actions that are contemplated under these regulations.

Under these regulations, financial institutions would be required to provide information on frozen sanctioned property that's in their possession and information on the profits realized from this property.

And, finally, the government may require that these profits from these frozen assets be paid to the government. This authority does not currently exist under SEMA.

This mechanism in Division 18 mirrors the European approach, where Euroclear's frozen Russian state assets yield about $5 billion annually. Clearly, windfall profits are being realized from these frozen Russian assets and these profits are being redirected to Ukraine via mechanisms that the EU has created.

For Canada, this mechanism also opens up new funding streams to support Ukraine.

The amendments to SEMA in Bill C-15 also unlock and extend reporting obligations such that the information can now be used for policy purposes, and not just by law enforcement.

Upon passage of Bill C-15, I urge officials to quickly develop the accompanying regulations to put these amendments into action. Let's learn about the Euroclear Russian assets now held in Canadian dollars. Let's examine the profits made and also how we can use them to assist Ukraine.

Let's also pass the amendment to SEMA in my bill, Bill S-214, to ensure that our access to Russian and other state assets themselves — the actual principal, not just the profits — is not impeded and is facilitated. And if we're very lucky, we may just hear more this evening about Bill S-214.

Colleagues, this is not abstract policy. This is justice in action. I urge this chamber to endorse all these measures decisively, and I urge the government to move quickly. Let us lead the world again in the cause of freedom and against tyranny. Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Paula Simons: Will Senator Dasko take a question?

Senator Dasko: Yes, I will.

Senator Simons: You mentioned that your own bill is on the Order Paper for this evening and, God willing and the creek don't rise, Senator Wells and Senator Housakos are on the list to speak to it. I wish to understand how your bill works in relationship to Bill C-15. Is there something in Bill C-15 that makes your bill redundant, or how will your bill be in conversation with these changes?

Senator Dasko: Thank you, senator, for those questions. They are excellent questions.

Actually, they work very closely together because the amendments in Bill C-15 allow the government to collect more information than they can now. They also permit the government to actually seize the profits from the assets that are currently frozen. That's there. These provisions were not there before; they are there now. That actually creates another mechanism for funding these profits.

Profits have been used by the Europeans. They have a mechanism. We are kind of doing what they did. We are putting in place what they did, with Bill C-15.

My bill, Bill S-214, takes another step to enable us to use the principal of the assets, going beyond the profits to the principal. Again, it does not require us to take any assets, but it provides the basis for taking the actual assets themselves.

This was actually intended in 2022, but the mechanism was flawed. There is a catch there. Bill S-214 undoes that. They fit together very well. I think that, as a package, they are perfect, and I recommend to everyone, including the government, that they take up Bill S-214. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Danièle Henkel: Honourable senators, I rise today during the consideration of Bill C-15 to speak on a pressing issue that directly affects the financial security of millions of Canadians: bank fraud. We hear about it in our offices, in our communities, in our families. In short, we hear about it everywhere. This is not an abstract issue. It is not a theoretical debate reserved for lawyers and financial sector specialists. Behind the figures I am about to mention are faces, families, lives turned upside down and someone's existence shattered by a single click.

[*English*]

In 2024, scammers defrauded Canadians of $638 million. In 2025, that figure rose to more than $704 million, according to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre. Yet, these figures capture only a fraction of the problem.

The RCMP itself estimates that just 5% to 10% of victims report fraud. The true cost is likely in the tens of billions of dollars, and the trend is worsening year after year. Every dollar stolen from a Canadian does not simply disappear; it fuels criminal networks that then act against Canadians.

At a time when we are working to rebuild our economy, we are allowing hundreds of millions of dollars to slip away every year into the pockets of fraudsters. That is money lost to our families and to our communities, and it's money gained by organized crime.

• (1540)

But beyond the numbers lies an even harsher reality: Lives are being shattered. Retirees are losing their life savings. Families are watching their emergency funds vanish. Vulnerable individuals are suddenly left without resources or recourse.

[*Translation*]

Data from the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre confirms that fraudsters target people under the age of 50 the most, but victims over the age of 50 suffer much greater financial losses on average.

Furthermore, beyond the financial losses, there are significant psychological and social consequences: distress, shame and isolation. All too often, victims are unfairly blamed.

These people are not careless. They are confronted with increasingly sophisticated schemes: phishing, SMS fraud, identity theft and fake investment opportunities. These scams rely on manipulation, the hope of a better life and a sense of urgency. Even the most cautious people can fall for them.

Like many other public figures, I myself have been a victim of identity theft: my image and even my voice were used without my knowledge to convince Canadians to invest in bogus financial opportunities. I therefore know first-hand the helplessness one feels when faced with this machine.

But for Canadians who lose their savings, the ordeal doesn't end with fraud. It keeps going when they contact their bank only to learn that the bank has authorized the transaction. They're told that they're liable. Then they're confronted with inscrutable internal policies that change from one institution to the next, all of them particularly unfavourable to victims who are left feeling completely powerless. Consumers are systematically left holding the bag, while the banking system shows little inclination to cooperate.

Yet this situation is by no means inevitable. In cases of credit card fraud, the law protects consumers. The consumer's liability is capped at $50, and in practice, credit card networks often have a zero liability policy.

However, if the fraud involves a debit card, Interac transfer or online payment, there is no federal law — none — requiring that banks refund fraud-related charges. In practical terms, consumers are left to deal with their bank on their own. The bank is the one that decides based on its own rules.

It's no accident that this is precisely where the losses are greatest. The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre reports that, in 2024, e-transfers and money transfers accounted for more than $200 million in losses compared to about $30 million for credit cards.

The conclusion is clear: Where protection is provided by law, the losses are contained; where no law exists, the losses are astronomical.

[*English*]

Given the scale of the problem, our Banking Committee examined Division 16 of Part 5 of Bill C-15, which amends the Bank Act to introduce provisions targeting consumer fraud. We heard from witnesses, experts, consumer protection agencies and public organizations responsible for overseeing the banking and financial system. The conclusion was clear: The measures in Bill C-15 are woefully inadequate.

In practice, the bill largely requires banks to establish their own policies to detect and prevent fraud and to mitigate its impacts. This is a shift of responsibility disguised as reform, not a meaningful framework for consumer protection.

The bill also requires banks to report certain fraud-related data to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada. However, this data would not be made public, yet transparency is precisely what is required to meaningfully change the game. Imagine a public report listing each bank's fraud rate. If one bank reports 1% and another reports 5%, the consumer choice would be clear. Transparency would drive competition, giving banks a strong incentive to invest in prevention. Their reputation and their clients' trust would be directly at stake.

The minister — and many public agencies that appeared before the Senate committees — described these provisions as a first step. I respect this caution, but I cannot share it. When losses reach this scale, we are no longer at the stage of first steps; we are already behind.

And this is not just my assessment; it is the conclusion of the very agencies tasked with protecting consumers. They are calling on the government to take the lead and significantly strengthen the legislative framework.

[*Translation*]

While Canada remains in wait-and-see mode, similar countries have decided to act swiftly to protect their citizens and correct the prevailing power imbalance.

In the U.K., when a customer is tricked into making a fraudulent money transfer, the bank must now reimburse them unless there has been gross negligence. The burden of proof rests with the bank, not the victim.

The results are very clear. The number of claims for this type of fraud fell by around 15% in the months after the new regime came into force because banks now know they will have to compensate victims, so they are investing more in detection and prevention.

Australia, for its part, has introduced the Scam-Safe Accord, which involves banks, telecommunications providers and public authorities. This, too, has produced tangible results. From 2023 to 2024, the number of fraud reports fell by around 18% and financial losses dropped by nearly 26%, according to the National Anti-Scam Centre.

While other democracies are protecting their citizens, Canada is currently leaving its consumers to face fraudsters alone. Situations like these make me wonder: If solutions exist, why aren't we implementing them?

My point is that fighting fraud is not an expense; it's an investment. Banks themselves lose millions of dollars every year. By investing in robust anti-fraud systems, they can protect consumers, but they will also protect their own bottom line. At the end of the day, everyone wins. That's why I can't fathom why no substantial amendments were adopted during consideration of the bill in the other place.

• (1550)

[*English*]

This also concerns a fundamental pillar of our economy: confidence in the banking system. When Canadians lose their savings because of fraud and their bank fails to support them, confidence in the system begins to erode.

At a time when our government is focused on strengthening the economy and protecting Canadians' purchasing power, addressing this gap would support economic stability and reinforce public trust. It is my sincere hope that the government will take seriously the message we, as senators, are sending on this issue and act urgently on this matter.

Honourable colleagues, it is precisely the role of the Senate to raise the alarm on these issues. Free from immediate pressures and with a long-term perspective, we have a responsibility to give voice to these concerns when Canadians are not sufficiently protected.

The proposals made in Bill C-15 fall short of what Canadians have every right to expect. It is time for the government to create a framework that truly protects Canadians, holds banks accountable and sends the clear signal that Canada will no longer be an easy target for fraudsters nor a playground for organized crime.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, before I call upon Senator C. Deacon to speak on this bill, I wish to remind you all to ensure that your cellphones and other electronic devices are on silent mode. That is for both audio notifications and vibration. It impacts the audio quality and the work of our interpreters. Thank you.

BUDGET 2025 IMPLEMENTATION BILL, NO. 1

THIRD READING—DEBATE

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Pupatello, seconded by the Honourable Senator Duncan, for the third reading of Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

Hon. Colin Deacon: Honourable senators, thank you, and thank you, Senator Henkel, for your excellent focus on that issue. I will say a few words, but not nearly as eloquently as you have.

I am glad to be able to speak in support of Bill C-15 at third reading.

Budget 2025 represented a recalibration from past budgets, particularly because it was far more focused on economic matters than we've seen.

As an illustration, 178 out of Bill C-15's 606 pages, or about 30% of them, were referred to the Banking Committee as part of the pre-study. This represented 16 of the 45 "Various Measures" divisions in Part 5 of the bill.

The fact that the Banking Committee dealt with such a big chunk of the budget implementation act is an important indicator of the focus on fiscal and economic matters we saw in this year's budget. This chamber has repeatedly voiced concerns related to the use of omnibus bills, and I think we all hope that Bill C-15 will be the start of a new trend.

Although pre-studies are not ideal, this two-month review provided us with a much more reasonable time frame than we have seen in the past, with fall economic statements and budget implementation acts squeezed into the last few weeks of June. I thank the government and Senator Moreau's office for the fact that we had time to do our job with Bill C-15.

I will quickly review the five divisions within Part 5 of the bill that I think are particularly important: Division 9, the consumer-driven banking act, and my apologies in advance as that part may not be quick; Division 23, an amendment to PIPEDA allowing for data mobility; and Division 45, the stablecoin act. These three divisions signal an important and long-awaited focus on the data economy and a centralization of regulatory oversight of financial technology innovation within the Bank of Canada. These are important things to note.

I will also speak briefly to the anti-fraud measures, about which we heard Senator Henkel speak eloquently, as well as Division 5, the amendments to the Red Tape Reduction Act allowing for regulatory sandboxes.

Colleagues, these are incredibly important and long-overdue legislative measures, which so many in Canada's innovation community have fought hard for over many years.

In speaking about them, I can't help but think about a very kind and generous Canadian we lost last year, Andrew Moor. Andrew was the CEO of Equitable Bank. His leadership, remarkable accomplishments and support for others were central to championing open banking in Canada. When Andrew took over as CEO of Equitable in 2007, it was a small $4-billion regional trust company with approximately 100 employees. Over the next 19 years, it became Canada's seventh-largest bank, with $142 billion in assets under administration and over 2,000 employees, serving over 600,000 Canadians and thousands of Canadian businesses.

In a 2022 interview, Andrew said:

> Being a challenger truly is a mindset. Some banks don't think much differently than they did 40 or 50 years ago which is truly amazing given how the world's changed.

Colleagues, Canada needs more challengers.

In 2014, Equitable Bank launched its completely digital bank: EQ Bank. EQ Bank has operated its core processing on the cloud from the outset, giving them a tremendous advantage because they could use data in real time to innovate. They strategically positioned themselves to address the underserved banking needs of immigrant and younger populations.

The lower overhead and modern services allowed the offering of savings accounts with meaningful interest rate returns and no-nonsense fees, bringing competition directly to our traditional banks.

Andrew was actively and very constructively engaged in government consultations and showed the way for others because his bank was already in a future state, something that remained rather foreign to our clunky big banks.

Sadly, Andrew Richard Garnault Moor passed away suddenly on June 23, 2025. His sharp mind and wit, generous heart and strong sense of purpose are deeply missed by countless people.

I truly wish that Andrew had lived to see the broader results of his decades of remarkable leadership in the financial services sector. He would have absolutely loved to see the specific elements of Bill C-15 that I'm going to be speaking about.

Colleagues, the legislation to implement consumer-driven banking, or what was called open banking, has finally arrived, and now you will understand why I have been insistently speaking on this issue over and over for the past number of years.

The reason is that this legislation will finally give Canadians, not their banks, control over their personal financial data. It finally gives Canadians the ability to easily transfer their business and their data anywhere within the marketplace of accredited financial services companies, including banks, credit unions and financial technology companies, among others.

The benefit is better, cheaper and more innovative financial products specifically tailored to meet the needs of Canadians, whom the big banks seem unable to serve in a cost-competitive manner.

Colleagues, when wishing to enable consumer-centric improvements, Ottawa has had a preference for regulating first, but a far more effective strategy is to support robust competition. Ottawa will never be able to regulate a company into becoming customer-centric. Only competition will achieve that goal. Consumer-directed banking will increase competition that will force our banks to become more consumer-centric.

Legislatively, we will finally cross an important finish line when we pass Bill C-15. However, considerable implementation work lies ahead to operationalize this system, and Ron Morrow at the Bank of Canada, who is in charge of this work, has stated that the work ahead is "daunting." But real progress can finally be made.

The choice of a technical standard regarding which data will be shared securely and efficiently across financial institutions is crucial. The Minister of Finance will select the technical standards body, and I echo the Senate Banking Committee's observation stating that they support the:

> . . . criteria the Minister must consider in making this selection and recommend that the chosen body operate under a sovereign Canadian governance framework and explore the use of an open source standard capable of iterative development for the Canadian consumer driven banking regime.

An important complementary element to consumer-driven banking is the change to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA, in Division 23 of Part 5. This amendment provides Canadians with a data mobility right, and that is the right for Canadians to control and share their data with the organizations that they trust. Importantly, this right can be applied to other sectors beyond consumer driven banking, such as health or tax data. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, or ISED, has indicated that the current amendments would permit such sector-specific frameworks to be created where desired.

• (1600)

That is a really important change where Canada is finally starting to catch up to the rest of the world.

In terms of Division 45, the stablecoin act, it includes very interesting new legislation that is enabling a framework around the usage of stablecoins in Canada. My office provided a primer on stablecoins that you are free to review if you are interested. It is available on my website.

This novel payment method was new to most of us on the Banking Committee, so it presented an important and meaningful learning experience. Stablecoins allow for the efficient settlement of payments globally, and they quickly became one of the largest payment rail systems in the world. For example, in 2024, the global annual value of funds transferred using stablecoins exceeded the combined volume of Visa and Mastercard. We are catching up to the world with this legislation. It is a really important move.

Ninety-nine per cent of the global volume in stablecoins is in U.S.-dollar-backed stablecoins. If Canada weren't going to move and create demand for a Canadian-backed stablecoin, this would not only be a lost opportunity for our economy and innovators, but it would also have significant monetary policy implications.

Simply, the world is shifting toward stablecoin-backed payment systems. If we do not, it will result in a decrease in our monetary sovereignty and a reduction in our domestic lending capacity and make us increasingly dependent on foreign financial infrastructure.

On a positive side, the creation of a robust Canadian stablecoin market could provide international markets with a highly trusted alternative to U.S.-dollar-backed stablecoins.

In terms of anti-fraud measures embedded in the amendments, again, it is hard to follow Senator Henkel's comments, but, currently, bank customers are responsible for a fraud event that occurs unless their bank decides that the customer was neither negligent nor complicit. Effectively, bank customers are guilty until their bank, a conflicted party, determines that they are not.

I've long promoted a reverse onus model. There are many available, as you heard earlier. The reverse onus model has been used in the United Kingdom, and it is where banks are responsible unless they have evidence demonstrating that the customer was complicit and grossly negligent.

Reversing the onus would cause our banks to implement countless fraud-prevention measures. They would be highly incentivized to do so. Right now, they have no incentive. There is no financial loss to them unless it is really clear that they were highly responsible.

I applaud MP Jean-Denis Garon, who attempted to amend Bill C-15 in this direction in the House Finance Committee, albeit unsuccessfully.

The Banking Committee believes that improvements are urgently needed and recommended standardized consumer protections at all banks, minimum technological safeguards and robust reporting requirements for scams and fraud-related incidents. The committee observed that banks should have similar safeguards on all their banking products, such as limited liability measures and compensation for victims of fraud.

The banking committee report offered the following observations:

> Banks need to take responsibility for their role in protecting Canadians from banking related fraud and they should be subject to significant penalties if they do not meet their obligations to protect consumers under the *Bank Act*. . . .

You are welcome to applaud that if you'd like.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator C. Deacon: Thank you, colleagues.

Currently, Canada's financial institutions are not required to report integrity- and security-eroding incidents of fraud to their regulator, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. They're also not required to report those incidents to their customers or the public. This is inexcusable. We need transparency in order for consumers to be confident in the integrity and security of their chosen financial institution and for markets to be fair and competitive.

Last year, I met with an investigator with the Toronto Police Service who used his own spreadsheet to track all the reports of fraud events that he was receiving within that jurisdiction. Shockingly, the rates of fraud that he was finding were on a scale similar to those reported for the entire country by the national fraud centre. Simply, we can have little confidence in the accuracy of fraud reporting in Canada.

Lastly, I want to speak about the Red Tape Reduction Act. Senator Housakos knows that I'm a tad concerned that the opposition decided to add red tape to the Red Tape Reduction Act with their amendments to Division 5 of Part 5, which relates to the use of regulatory sandboxes.

Sandboxes are essential and well-proven tools for introducing much-needed regulatory modernization and agility. Sandboxes are not about deregulation, yet were seen to be that by many parliamentarians.

Consider that Canada is leading the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, in terms of levels of regulatory burden as it relates to command and control regulations. By definition, this type of regulation restricts innovation because it defines how a given regulatory objective must be achieved. It defines the process, not the result. That, by definition, eliminates the ability to innovate.

This problem can be addressed by getting regulators and innovators to work together in the same room and understand both the regulatory objective and the innovation opportunity, and find new ways to serve both purposes: not just protect the public but ensure that the long-term opportunities are also able to be accessed.

To do so, legacy legislation that defines existing regulatory regimes must be suspended in order to have a controlled and monitored regulatory sandbox while new approaches are explored and tested.

Unfortunately, this objective was completely misunderstood, and, as a consequence, the opposition forced the use of sandboxes to be restricted to just financial technologies and clean tech. Other areas where outdated regulatory regimes are restricting progress, be it in agriculture, forestry, fisheries — you name it — will have to wait.

I'm disappointed that unnecessary hurdles were added to this important and urgently needed initiative.

Colleagues, to conclude, I've sought to champion the extremely hard work of Canada's innovation sector during my time in the Senate. Consequently, I am thrilled to see the innovation- and productivity-enhancing economic regimes included in Bill C-15. It represents an all-important first step in the right direction for this government.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Claude Carignan: I too would like to thank the members of the National Finance Committee who worked on this bill. I also want to thank the other committees that studied this bill, as well, including the Banking Committee and the Transport Committee. Thank you for your collaborative efforts on this bill.

Like Senator Pupatello, I'd like to highlight the extraordinary work done by Senator Marshall over the years. She was an extremely valuable member of the committee and a mentor. She helped guide other members and provided many valuable tips and tricks. She will be missed. She was a pillar of our committee.

If you are listening, Senator Marshall, thank you very much.

Honourable senators, I rise today at third reading of Bill C-15 to draw your attention to a specific part of this omnibus bill, namely Division 1 of Part 5, which enacts the high-speed rail network act.

I want to be quite clear from the outset. The debate isn't about whether Canada should improve passenger rail service in the Quebec City-Toronto corridor. The answer to that question is yes. Nor is the debate about whether VIA Rail's current service is satisfactory. The answer is no. The real debate lies elsewhere. It concerns whether we have the right, simply for expediency, to limit public recourse, to increase uncertainty among landowners, to concentrate more power in the hands of the state, and — if I may add the following point — to completely neutralize an independent organization responsible for promoting the public interest. In my opinion, the answer is no.

• (1610)

Honourable senators, what this bill does is serious. It doesn't just authorize a project, it replaces a robust process with a legal fiction while repealing access to an independent, impartial, quasi-judicial body.

Under the Canada Transportation Act, no railway project can be built without authorization from the Canadian Transportation Agency, or CTA. This authorization requires a concrete analysis of the appearance of the respective interests of the project's proponents and of the individuals and municipalities affected by the application.

The Canadian Transportation Agency is required to answer a basic question. Is the route suitable? To answer this question, the CTA has been applying a robust, balanced analysis for decades.

In practical terms, here is what the CTA considers.

First, it considers the railway's operational needs, including safety, topography, gradients, curves, speed and integration into the existing network. Second are the impacts on local communities, including expropriations, noise, vibrations, land use planning and public concerns. Third, it considers the public interest and economic interest, including the actual benefit of the project, its contribution to the transportation network and its effects on logistics and competition. Fourth, it looks at environmental impacts, including natural habitats, species, waterways and significant negative effects. Finally, it examines alternative solutions. Is there a less harmful route? Can the impacts be reduced?

Honourable senators, this process is not bureaucratic. It is essential. It ensures a balance between the development of infrastructure and the protection of citizens.

What does Bill C-15 actually do?

It sweeps all that aside in one fell swoop. Section 5 provides that the construction of the network is deemed to have been authorized by the agency. Bill C-15 goes even further. It explicitly prohibits the agency from reviewing, amending or revoking this authorization. In other words, the agency no longer analyzes, assesses or makes decisions. Basically, it no longer exists for this project.

The Minister of Transport and the developer, Alto, then become both judge and jury. All the issues I just listed are dropped from the independent decision-making process. The impacts on municipalities are no longer analyzed. Alternative routes are no longer considered. The project's needs are no longer weighed against citizens' rights. There is no longer any independent scrutiny.

We are replacing a rigorous test with automatic government approval. We are replacing a quasi-judicial body with a political decision.

Honourable senators, I really can't understand why, as a society, we would deprive ourselves of an assessment mechanism as comprehensive and robust as the Canadian Transportation Agency. Above all, we are depriving citizens of a neutral arbiter.

Colleagues, this is not simplification; it is neutralization. What follows is in addition to everything else: a special scheme for expropriation; no obligation to negotiate before expropriation; no public hearings; objections reduced to a written submission within 30 days; a two-year period of uncertainty; pre-expropriation powers that restrict land use; and even the option to proceed with land acquisition before the impact assessment has been fully completed.

The message is clear. The project takes precedence. Rights will be adjusted later. Now, even the independent body responsible for ensuring a balance has been sidelined.

Honourable senators, you're being asked to accept all this in exchange for a project that could cost between $60 billion and $100 billion. The benefits of this project are uncertain, and the ridership is purely speculative. We're told the prices will be competitive, but there has been no assessment of either construction or operating costs.

We're being asked to pay for a product whose length and breadth are unknown. In some cases, it would save passengers just a few dozen minutes.

That is why I have to ask: Was it really worth sidelining the Canadian Transportation Agency — a pillar of our system — for a project whose justification is dubious, even disputed?

There is an alternative: high-frequency rail, which some experts consider more realistic, less expensive, less intrusive and, above all, consistent with standard public protection mechanisms.

You didn't know that, honourable senators? Why? Because the part that concerns high-speed rail is buried in a colossal omnibus bill that made the matter impossible to study with the seriousness it deserves and in keeping with public expectations of the Senate.

Progress and speed cannot come at any cost, and certainly not at the cost of eliminating an independent process designed to protect the public interest. Our role in the Senate is to ask these questions, to stand up for balance and to refuse to allow speed to become a pretext for eroding fundamental safeguards.

For all these reasons, I believe that this part of the bill goes too far. Not only does it modernize rail transportation, it weakens our institutions. In my opinion, colleagues, this is neither prudent, fair nor acceptable. I will therefore oppose the passage of Bill C-15.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I, too, rise at third reading of Bill C-15, the 2025 budget bill. I will make a few short remarks. I gave lengthy remarks at second reading, and I certainly don't want to repeat all the problematic aspects of Bill C-15.

First, I want to thank Senator Pupatello for her very worthy sponsoring of this bill. She did a very good job. I also want to thank Senator Carignan as chair of the National Finance Committee for his usual outstanding work, as well as all the committees that participated in studying Bill C-15, which is ultimately our responsibility in this place.

My fundamental problem with this is very simple: This is an omnibus bill the likes of which we have never seen before. Yes, Senator C. Deacon, you say we have had two months of pre-study, and you laud the government's openness and transparency, but the reality is that this is a bill that is 604 pages with 606 clauses. If the Senate, with its usual speed, as well as the House, actually spent three years studying this omnibus bill, I still think we wouldn't be able to do justice to the taxpayers of the country.

I understand that this is a practice that has been going on for decades and decades, but it has become progressively worse year after year. At some point and at some juncture of this exercise, even as members of the upper chamber — and we know our place, which is "no taxation without representation," which is ultimately the right of the House of Commons — given our job as supervisors, or a board that has a fiduciary duty to represent the interests of taxpayers, we need to tell the other place that this has to stop.

Senator Downe, who has been here even longer than I have, repeats this over and over, budget debate after budget debate, for at least the 17 years that I have been here. Omnibus bills, honourable colleagues, are nothing more than an exercise in lazy legislative shortcuts; that's what they are. They want to find shortcuts in order to move certain elements forward without proper scrutiny.

This budget, in my mind, certainly achieves that goal. It is also an exercise in fiscal irresponsibility at a time when we have achieved, in the past decade, historic debt and deficits.

• (1620)

We are at a point in time where this young generation of Canadians, with the debt on their shoulders that we've saddled upon them for over a decade, has reached a point where it will have tremendous ramifications.

I have said this many times — tongue-in-cheek, of course — but when we grew up, we had Johnny Cash and we had Bob Hope, and I keep saying that this generation has no cash and no hope.

I say it tongue-in-cheek, but I am really concerned because I have children. God willing, one day I will have grandchildren, and we have to leave them a house that is fiscally responsible and a house that is in order so that they can have the same opportunities as we did.

The truth of the matter is that there is no other G7 nation that has a higher debt and a higher deficit per capita than our country does, particularly when you compile all the levels of debt in our country.

For the last five or six years, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, has repeatedly given us a terrible mark when it comes to productivity. We all recognize we have a productivity problem, and it is not enough to tinker here and tweak over there and talk about cutbacks that the government is trying to make in a public relations exercise, and then they table a budget at a deficit of $78.3 billion.

In my second reading speech, I think I clearly highlighted what the projections are over the next 10 years, and it is not a pretty picture.

The government says that this is a bill that is going to build Canada strong at speeds we have never seen before, but just to move a budget through the House and the Senate has taken this government a year.

They have put into place Build Canada Homes, which is promising to build 500,000 units a year. The government has been in power for 11 years now, and they are nowhere near the 500,000 units. At least it would be reasonable if they said they are trying to build 500,000 units over the mandate of their government or over three or four years, but like I said, we have had governments — and it is not unique to this government — engaging in an exercise of public relations rather than fiscal responsibility and good management.

There are good elements in this bill, obviously, but when you look at the numbers, the numbers don't lie. There are more red flags in it than anything else.

Our role — and we know what it is — in this place is sober second thought. It is incumbent on government appointees to support the budget. It is incumbent on the opposition to criticize it, and there is plenty to criticize in this budget.

As a result, the opposition will not support Bill C-15. It is incumbent on us in support of future generations of Canadians who are going to be picking up the tab.

I have been given the great privilege on our side to be the critic of Bill C-15, or the budget bill, as well as the estimates bill and the supply bill, which is something that another member of our caucus has so diligently and effectively done for years now. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to say that if you look up in the dictionary a great parliamentarian, a picture would be flashing of Senator Elizabeth Marshall.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Housakos: Right now she is cursing me in some kind of language that Newfoundlanders would be cursing me in, but I have to say that I had the privilege of working with Senator Marshall for 16 years. She is somebody who came to this place and already had a distinguished career — she served for 10 years as the Auditor General of Newfoundland and Labrador. She was the Deputy Minister of Social Services and a distinguished Deputy Minister of Transportation and Works. She was also elected to the Newfoundland and Labrador legislature and served as a cabinet minister in the Danny Williams government, and, of course, she was appointed to this place in 2010 by Prime Minister Harper.

I will say this: During 16 years with Senator Marshall, she taught us all what principles are about; she taught us all what loyalty is about. She is fiercely loyal to her province. She is fiercely loyal to this country and to our caucus, and she was never afraid to tell us what needed to be outlined at caucus meetings. She also had this special skill of reading numbers and explaining it to those of us who are not very good at math.

She decided to leave a little bit abruptly. As you all know, her expiration date was in a few weeks, but it was typical of Senator Marshall. She does everything on her terms, and she wanted to spend a lot more time with her son in B.C. and her children and grandchildren who are spread out a little bit across the country.

We wish her only the best, and we thank her for her service to this chamber and to our country.

Beth, I'm sorry, but I had to pay tribute to you somehow.

On that note, we call the question on Bill C-15.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

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

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker: In my opinion the "yeas" have it.

And two honourable senators having risen:

The Hon. the Speaker: I see two senators rising. Do we have an agreement on the length of the bell?

Hon. Senators: Fifteen minutes.

The Hon. the Speaker: Fifteen minutes? Is leave granted?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: The vote will take place at 4:41 p.m. Call in the senators.

• (1640)

DECLARATION OF PRIVATE INTEREST

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, Senator Dhillon has made a declaration of private interest regarding Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025, and in accordance with rule 9-7(1)(a), that senator shall not be called except to abstain.

THIRD READING

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Pupatello, seconded by the Honourable Senator Duncan, for the third reading of Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the question is as follows: It was moved by the Honourable Senator Pupatello, seconded by the Honourable Senator Duncan:

> That Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025, be read the third time.

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

YEAS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Adler	MacAdam
Al Zaibak	McBean
Arnold	McNair
Arnot	Miville-Dechêne
Aucoin	Mohamed
Black	Moncion
Boehm	Moreau
Boudreau	Muggli
Burey	Osler
Cardozo	Oudar
Clement	Pate
Cormier	Patterson
Coyle	Petitclerc
Dalphond	Petten
Dasko	Prosper
Deacon (*Nova Scotia*)	Pupatello

Deacon (*Ontario*)	Quinn
Dean	Ravalia
Downe	Ringuette
Duncan	Robinson
Forest	Ross
Gerba	Saint-Germain
Gignac	Simons
Harder	Surette
Henkel	Verner
Karetak-Lindell	Wells (*Alberta*)
Kingston	Wilson
Klyne	Woo
LaBoucane-Benson	Youance
Loffreda	Yussuff—60

NAYS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Ataullahjan	Martin
Batters	McCallum
Carignan	McPhedran
Housakos	Smith
MacDonald	Wells (*Newfoundland and Labrador*)—10

ABSTENTIONS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Nil

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

STRENGTHENING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM AND BORDERS BILL

MESSAGE FROM COMMONS—MOTION FOR CONCURRENCE IN COMMONS AMENDMENTS AND NON-INSISTENCE UPON SENATE AMENDMENTS ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the message from the House of Commons:

Thursday, March 26, 2026

EXTRACT, —

That a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint Their Honours that, in relation to Bill C-12, An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures, the House:

proposes that amendment 2 made by the Senate be amended by replacing the text of paragraph 75.1(3)(c) with the following: "the proportion of refugee protection claimants referred to in paragraph (b) who exited and re-entered Canada after the day of entry referred to in paragraph 101(1)(b.1) of that Act;";

agrees with amendment 3 made by the Senate; and

respectfully disagrees with amendment 1 because the amendment would remove Canadian citizens and permanent residents from the clear and transparent information-sharing framework established by Part 5 of the bill, because information-sharing relating to these individuals already occurs under existing statutory authorities and would continue to occur in their absence from the framework established by Bill C-12, as the purpose of Part 5 is to replace the current patchwork of authorities with a single coherent regime that establishes consistent partners, clearly defined purposes, and modern privacy safeguards, and furthermore, because excluding Canadian citizens and permanent residents from these provisions would perpetuate existing inefficiencies, undermine modernization initiatives within the immigration system, and reduce the transparency and accountability that Bill C-12 intends to strengthen.

ATTEST

Eric Janse

Clerk of the House of Commons

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate) moved:

That, in relation to Bill C-12, An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures, the Senate:

(a) agree to the amendment made by the House of Commons to its amendment 2; and

(b) do not insist on its amendment 1 to which the House of Commons has disagreed; and

That a message be sent to the House of Commons to acquaint that house accordingly.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise to speak on the message regarding Bill C-12, the strengthening Canada's immigration system and borders act. I would like to thank the senators for their thoughtful and thorough deliberations at every stage of the proceedings, including at the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, at the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs, and during the debates in this chamber.

[*English*]

As the chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology stated at third reading, the committee met for over 13 hours on Bill C-12, hearing from 35 witnesses and receiving 36 written submissions.

[*Translation*]

The Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs spent six hours hearing from witnesses and received 35 written briefs. It also heard additional testimony from public servants during its clause-by-clause meeting.

At third reading alone, we had over nine hours of debate. Once again, colleagues, your commitment to addressing certain difficult issues has been unwavering.

[*English*]

I would like to thank Senator Dean for his tireless work and the elegance with which he undertook the sponsorship of Bill C-12.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Moreau: I would like to thank you for attending a great number of committee meetings, for staying on top of the often highly technical literature relating to a bill as complex as Bill C-12, and especially for your ability to understand arguments on both sides of every issue. Our colleagues have paid tribute to your thoughtfulness, openness and wholehearted engagement with the difficult questions raised by this bill. I want to echo their praise, which you fully deserve. Senator Dean, your acumen and collegiality are, without a doubt, worthy of emulation. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The responsible management of Canada's immigration and asylum system is at the heart of the bill, with the aim of preserving its fairness, credibility and sustainability as it faces significant pressures, while maintaining the safeguards and respect for procedural fairness that Canadians are entitled to expect.

Let's now move on to the heart of our debate, namely the message from the other place, for that alone is the subject of our deliberations today. The House of Commons accepted the provisions recommended by the Senate providing for an automatic review of the bill five years after its coming into force. The minister and MPs saw these amendments as a way to strengthen accountability while keeping the bill's main measures intact.

MPs supported the requirement that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship table a report on the implementation of the new one-year ineligibility measure, including specific information, before both houses of Parliament. This amendment will provide both the House of Commons and the Senate with structured information on how the measure is functioning in practice over time.

[*English*]

For the sake of greater clarity, I would like to note that the other place proposes a technical rewording of the Senate's amendment requiring a ministerial report. The Senate's wording referred to the proportion of refugee protection claimants impacted by "the day of entry referred to in that paragraph," which appeared to refer to the Senate's proposed new section 75.1(3)(b). The other place clarifies that the day of entry is the day referred to in paragraph 101(1)(b.1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

However, the other place could not support the first amendment proposed by the Senate. In the government's view, the proposed amendment to exclude citizens and permanent residents would negatively impact Canada's domestic information-sharing framework. It would also undermine the goal of improving how the government shares information with trusted domestic partners in Canada.

Colleagues, Senator Senior's third reading speech raised deeply felt concerns born of her experience with the immigration process and those of her loved ones and community, an experience with which many of our colleagues are also deeply acquainted. These concerns are extremely valid and deserve the chamber's attention. Indeed, the government cannot create a situation where we would have two different strata of citizenship, with one type of citizen being afforded privacy rights, while the other is denied that same right. The government shares this view, and this is reflected in the original drafting of Bill C-12. A Canadian is a Canadian. Period.

[*Translation*]

Information sharing already exists today for temporary residents, permanent residents and citizens under the current legislation. An example would be when a Canadian by birth requires consular services abroad in an emergency, or for the issuance of a passport, or when an officer from the Canada Border Services Agency at points of entry into Canada, or a liaison officer posted abroad, contacts the Passport Program to verify the authenticity and validity of a Canadian document.

This involves internal and national information sharing aimed at facilitating access to government services to which citizens are entitled. All of this is consistent and applies to everyone, whether they are temporary residents, naturalized Canadians or those born in Canada. The information is treated in the same way, with the same respect and the same confidentiality safeguards.

Colleagues, the bill does not weaken privacy protection. On the contrary, it establishes clearer rules, strict limits and modern privacy safeguards.

[*English*]

By proposing that information on citizens and permanent residents be excluded, the government views the amendment proposed by the Senate as a reintroduction of a patchwork approach, which undermines the improvements and protections these changes bring. A focus in Bill C-12 is stronger safeguards, not new powers. Excluding permanent residents and citizens would leave them with fewer protections and less transparency.

The government's position is that if stronger protections are the goal, the first amendment proposed by the Senate runs counter to that.

[*Translation*]

Furthermore, the government believes that the proposed Senate amendment would create operational challenges and lead to inconsistent service delivery. The sharing of information on permanent residents and citizens is essential to the delivery of core services by the federal government and its partners. The proposed Senate amendment would not restrict information sharing in the future; it would simply deprive permanent residents and citizens of the benefits that the bill brings to standard and essential practices. By having clear information on the entire client base, the government will be better able to ensure consistent service delivery and improved program integrity for all Canadians.

For these reasons, colleagues, the government is asking us to accept the House of Commons' decision not to approve our first amendment. Once the following two amendments, which would establish review mechanisms, have been approved, the Senate and the House of Commons will have the authority to evaluate the processes and information-sharing provisions set out in the bill, should this be deemed necessary and appropriate.

[*English*]

In conclusion, colleagues, let us remember that Bill C-12 was designed to strike the right balance in honouring our commitment to maintain a secure system where risks exist, through a reliable process and fair decisions, all the while ensuring that our systems continue to operate credibly under pressures — pressures that have intensified in recent years on several fronts. Protecting Canadian sovereignty and ensuring the safety of Canadians are now more important than ever.

Honourable senators, thanks to your sustained efforts, our chamber of review has managed to improve a complex and contentious piece of legislation. While keeping the bill's core measures intact, the Senate has strengthened the accountability mechanisms in this bill.

• (1700)

Now I urge you to adopt the message from the other place so that Bill C-12 may receive Royal Assent by the end of this week. Thank you.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

An Hon. Senator: On division.

(Motion agreed to, on division.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

BILL RESPECTING CYBER SECURITY, AMENDING THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT AND MAKING CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS TO OTHER ACTS

FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-8, An Act respecting cyber security, amending the Telecommunications Act and making consequential amendments to other Acts.

(Bill read first time.)

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

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 4, 2025-26

THIRD READING

Hon. Sandra Pupatello moved third reading of Bill C-23, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

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

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Some Hon. Senators: No.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker: In my opinion the "yeas" have it.

And two honourable senators having risen:

The Hon. the Speaker: Is there an agreement on a bell?

Some Hon. Senators: Now.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

YEAS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Adler
Al Zaibak
Arnold
Arnot
Aucoin
Black
Boehm
Boudreau
Burey
Cardozo
Clement
Cormier
Coyle
Dalphond
Dasko
Deacon (*Nova Scotia*)
Deacon (*Ontario*)
Dean
Downe
Duncan
Forest
Gerba
Gignac
Harder
Henkel
Karetak-Lindell
Kingston
Klyne
LaBoucane-Benson
Loffreda
MacAdam
McBean
McNair
McPhedran
Miville-Dechêne
Mohamed
Moncion
Moreau
Muggli
Osler
Oudar
Pate
Patterson
Petitclerc
Petten
Prosper
Pupatello
Quinn
Ravalia
Ringuette
Saint-Germain
Simons
Surette
Verner
Wells (*Alberta*)
Wilson
Woo
Youance
Yussuff—59

NAYS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Ataullahjan
Batters
Carignan
Martin
McCallum
Smith
Housakos
MacDonald
Wells (*Newfoundland and Labrador*)—9

ABSTENTIONS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Nil

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 1, 2026-27

THIRD READING

Hon. Sandra Pupatello moved third reading of Bill C-24, An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

• (1710)

She said: I am delighted to be here today to speak to the appropriation bill for interim supply 2026-27.

I know you're thinking, "Oh my God, she is up again."

I just want to say this before I begin: I was sworn in to the Senate in May, and it took me a little while — and I can't say I have this down pat — to understand the flow of these money bills. If you don't come from finance — if you're an engineer, if you're an architect or if you're a doctor — I'm not sure you have seen books like this before coming into this place. It's a tsunami of paper.

I wanted to share what I've learned in my short stint here so far. It starts with the budget bill. This is for my own edification. I am number 105 of 105 senators, so I really was the last one in, but there was a group coming in with me. The budget bill is first. It is the idea book; it is what the new government and those new leaders decide upon to show "We are about this." They put it all in a budget book, which sends bureaucrats flying to understand this because they have so many bills that they now need to change or they have to make those new ideas into law. That's why it takes weeks before we actually receive a budget bill that goes with the budget book.

They make all their announcements, and bureaucrats finally write the bill. Then the bill arrives. They were kind enough to put it in several binders for me, and that's what we just finished voting on a minute ago. But what happens throughout the year is those bureaucrats have no idea how much money it is going to cost to implement that budget book. They have a grand idea, and they have a notion, but then they have to do the hard work of figuring out how much money, in what quarter that money will be spent and how that money will be spent, as well as to what level and what number.

Then we start getting into the estimates, and we receive the estimate for the year, but we don't approve a whole year of estimates. We only do quarters at a time, so every quarter or so, they come back and say they're refining their numbers. How about that fleet of tankers they wanted to buy? They're off by a couple billion dollars or under or over.

Every quarter, we end up with these documents that are constantly refining the numbers, which gives us another opportunity to get our eyes on the lines and say, "How are they doing in implementing their ideas?"

From a flow perspective, that was a huge learning curve for me to understand. For my colleagues who were sworn in with me, Senator Henkel and Senator Wilson, you probably understood all that already, but that took me a bit of time to sort out. Now we know how we can hold the government to account, and we understand that senators are in the baseball field with three bases loaded and we're the last batter up. Everyone else is in the auditorium watching what is going to happen. Are we going to get the last kick after we've studied it to let those bills pass, let the money flow and let the government continue?

After figuring that out, I now understand these money bills are really important, so I want to thank our Government Representative's Office for giving me the opportunity to speak about these things and to understand how this moment with these senators is the crux of moving government forward in this country. To me, that is what supply bills are all about.

Now I will go back to what I'm going to talk about today.

[*Translation*]

As you know, interim supply bills are an integral part of the normal appropriations cycle. In order for federal government departments and agencies to carry out their activities, they must obtain parliamentary authorization to spend public funds.

[*English*]

If you look through the document that arrived, it's called the Main Estimates. In it, you see that for each department or agency, there's a line item called "Voted." There's another line called "Statutory." When it reads "Voted," that means the other place has voted to spend. Those change as priorities change. The other line "Statutory" represents the line items that people agreed to years ago — you don't vote on it every time — like the Canada Pension Plan, or CPP, and Old Age Security. They don't come back every year and ask, "Will we have CPP?" That is an automatic payment, so it goes on the "Statutory" line, which includes amounts approved in other acts and are ongoing, and it also includes acts that identify how that money is spent. The rules are set out, and if you meet them, you're paid. When you hit 65, you just might collect CPP. We don't approve those items every year.

Before this bill for the upcoming first quarter was tabled, you saw the government table each department's plan. It's also online for each department, each agency and each Crown corporation that is funded by the federal government. That is important because it aligns with the money they are seeking approval to spend, and it tells us what we'll do with it.

The other day, Senator LaBoucane-Benson tabled a box of all of those plans, and each of us, with our areas of interest, could delve into them to see what they're doing. How are we funding all of the services that we are chasing?

[*Translation*]

In the Main Estimates, the government sets out the amounts it needs to fund its activities for the coming fiscal year, which begins on April 1. While the Main Estimates provide an overview of expenditures for the whole year, the interim supply bill we are debating today covers the first three months of these estimated annual expenditures.

[*English*]

The government tables the Main Estimates. Then the government introduces an interim supply bill to authorize funding for those first three months of the fiscal year until parliamentarians adequately study and give final approval to the Main Estimates in June. Those Main Estimates are going to be back here before the summer break, for sure.

That spending requested through this interim supply is already included in those Main Estimates, but we don't vote on the whole of the year. An important detail about interim supply is that the amount requested is typically based on twelfths of the amount, so notionally, they correspond to monthly cash requirements.

For most departmental votes, the requested interim supply represents one quarter or three months of the total voted authorities in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year. Some departments ask for more in the interim than the standard of the three twelfths, and that is because they already know that in a specific quarter, they are going to require more. That could be adjusted again in the next quarter. And the Treasury Board must approve that before it lands here in front of us.

Honourable senators, transparency is important here. The government uses the estimates and associated documents to show how it plans to spend taxpayers' money. Along with the Main Estimates, Departmental Plans reflect the government's base spending plans.

[*Translation*]

Departmental Plans are one component of the series of budgetary documents, which also includes Departmental Results Reports, the Main Estimates and the supplementary estimates. All these documents are available online.

[*English*]

These plans outline the federal government's objectives, responsibilities and top priorities over the course of the next three years. They provide details on resource requirements found in the Main Estimates based on each organization's mandate, priorities and operations. They also allow parliamentarians and Canadians to track — that's our job — the progress of these priorities and better hold the government to account.

For increased transparency and accessibility, Canadians and parliamentarians can access these estimates and the government's other financial, personnel and performance data online, including within the interactive GC InfoBase application. Apparently, it's getting stellar reviews around the world.

Let me turn to the Main Estimates for 2026-27. The Main Estimates are a snapshot of planned spending taken before the beginning of the fiscal year, which is April 1.

Part I provides a summary of planned spending across the federal government for the whole of the 2026-27 fiscal year. It's a historical year-over-year comparison showing you what it was last year and what their planned spending is into the transfer payments, operating and capital expenditures and public debt charges.

Part II provides estimates by organization and offers more details on the planned expenditures, so if you flip to the back, you will see a breakdown of the 20 to 50 lines within that one department, Crown corporation or outside agency.

An annex to Parts I and II provides more details on the inclusion of the proposed schedules to the appropriation bill. I will note the amounts shown in the annex represent the full supply for the Main Estimates. Again, it shows the whole year of which the interim supply that we're considering today is only a portion.

It is only that first quarter.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, this year, the President of the Treasury Board tabled the Main Estimates in the other place on February 26. The interim supply bill was introduced on March 23.

• (1720)

Over the coming months, MPs will have the opportunity to scrutinize all the government's spending plans. This will take place prior to the approval of the other voted expenditures set out in the Main Estimates by means of another appropriation bill scheduled for June.

[*English*]

The Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2026-27 represent $502.8 billion in planned budgetary spending, of which $230.4 billion is subject to Parliament's approval through the first two appropriation acts. That is what they could foresee at this point. They can look at this one in front of us now and look ahead to what the next quarter will be, which they mention we'll likely see by the end of June.

As the government makes investments in priority areas, it's decreasing spending on day-to-day government operations. Through the Comprehensive Expenditure Review, or CER, $9 billion in savings will be realized in 2026-27. This will reach $13 billion annually by 2028-29, with a goal of $60 billion in savings over five years.

[*Translation*]

The Main Estimates, of which these provisional appropriations form part, reflect the government's ongoing commitment to addressing Canadians' priorities.

Allow me to highlight some of the organizations that are seeking more than $10 billion in voted budgetary expenditures.

[*English*]

One of those departments asking for more than $10 billion is the Department of National Defence, which is no surprise. It is seeking Parliament's authority to spend $48.4 billion. Esteemed colleagues, Canada finds itself in an era shaped by significant global uncertainty. As I mentioned Tuesday, the world is giving us universal headaches over this, with state and non-state actors who don't follow international rules and, in general, a global order in flux.

It's clear that Canada must take stronger steps to protect itself and become more self-sufficient while remaining engaged with partners across the globe. I can confirm a response to a question that was asked on Tuesday around Canada's NATO commitment: We have met our 2% commitment and are on track to meet NATO's 5% Defence Investment Pledge by 2025, which is exciting.

[*Translation*]

Another critical issue is Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. True reconciliation is not limited to symbolic gestures. Concrete measures must be taken in the areas of education, health care, governance and economic development opportunities. That is why the proposed spending for the Department of Indigenous Services totals $23.9 billion.

[*English*]

With this funding, the department will support and improve Indigenous health and well-being and ensure Indigenous children get the care and support they need to thrive. The department will also work with Inuit partners to eliminate tuberculosis across Inuit Nunangat by 2030.

Another critical area of work is closing the infrastructure gap by 2030 by supporting community-led decision-making on First Nations infrastructure projects, including high-priority repairs and renovation, multi-year capital projects, education facilities and housing.

We heard Tuesday that the government has resolved 97.5% of the drinking water issues in those communities and across our Native communities since committing to eradicating this issue. I think that is impressive.

The Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs is seeking $11.8 billion to carry out its objectives. These include acknowledging and redressing past harms with respect to items like land claim resolutions; affirming and respecting Indigenous rights and supporting self-determination; and leading the Government of Canada's work in the North and Arctic, among other things.

The Department of Employment and Social Development is seeking $13.6 billion. It will use this funding to support the government's commitment to making housing more affordable by creating new careers in the skilled trades. It will do this by helping workers gain skills needed for jobs in residential construction to build both traditional and modular housing through initiatives such as the Sustainable Jobs Training Fund, the Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program and the Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy.

The department will also contribute to the government's efforts to attract the best talent in the world to help build our economy while also returning our overall immigration rates to sustainable levels. It will support this by ensuring that genuine employers with real labour-market needs can access the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

Another key focus area for the department is to keep working with its partners to build and maintain a Canada-wide early learning and child care system, as well as continuing its work in implementing the National School Food Program in collaboration with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners.

The department also prioritizes helping seniors afford retirement through delivering the Old Age Security program and the Canada Pension Plan.

[*Translation*]

Health Canada, meanwhile, is seeking $10.4 billion in funding to achieve a number of objectives. These include improving mental health and addiction supports, helping Canadians age with dignity and supporting and improving access to oral health care services. Health Canada is also working to improve affordable access to pharmaceuticals, reduce the harms associated with substance use and tackle the overdose crisis.

[*English*]

Honourable colleagues, the 2026-27 Main Estimates also contain $272.4 billion in statutory expenditures. As mentioned before, we're spending that no matter what as of April 1. It is spending that has been previously approved in legislation, including $88.8 billion in elderly benefits, $57.4 billion for the Canada Health Transfer, $53.7 billion in public debt charges, $27.2 billion for fiscal equalization and $17.9 billion for the Canada Social Transfer.

I invite honourable senators to explore the Main Estimates, department plans and other government financial reports on Canada.ca and the GC InfoBase to see how this public money is being used.

Honourable colleagues, the government continues to invest transparently, efficiently and prudently in programs and services that Canadians rely on while ensuring resources go to priorities that matter the most to Canadians.

This supply bill and the Main Estimates not only provide important insight into how public funds will be used but also show that the government is responding to immediate needs while continuing to make that long-term investment to benefit all Canadians.

In short, I hope you'll support this bill. Let us be that last one up to bat. We're going to bring it home. Thank you.

Hon. Denise Batters: Will Senator Pupatello take a few questions?

Senator Pupatello: Yes.

Senator Batters: Thank you. First, you indicated early in your remarks that there was apparently $9 billion in savings that the government has claimed to have found in this budgetary cycle. However, in your speech, you didn't list any of the specific cost savings that the Liberal government says it has found in your speech. What are the savings or cuts that total $9 billion?

Senator Pupatello: Thank you. If you breeze through the document entitled Main Estimates and compare the 2024-25 and 2025-26 lines, you see, in almost every instance, the current year's spending is lower. That is part of where the money is found for that Comprehensive Expenditure Review exercise.

It's not completed; not every ministry was assigned the same amount of spending savings to find. For example, some ministries — or the lion's share — are looking for 15% in savings, but there is a distinct list, which includes Indigenous Affairs, assigned 2%. Each quarter, we will see how much of the savings are being implemented. However, the mere passage of the bill a moment ago in Bill C-15 — which allows the government to, for example, offer buyout packages for the workforce — contributes to what they need to do to reach $9 billion.

Senator Batters: We are all sitting here right now, and you expect us to vote on this soon, so I don't have the ability to flip through and compare last year's and this year's amounts. Can you give us concrete examples of some of the biggest cost savings amounts they have found for some of these departments? You mentioned public service cuts. What is that total figure out of the $9 billion that they are estimating will be saved by public service cuts?

• (1730)

Senator Pupatello: Thank you.

Rather than just picking one — as you can see, I have little tabs all over my paper — this document was actually public quite a long time ago so we could look at these details. All of us had that opportunity, certainly, at the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance as well.

I will tell you that the $9 billion is over the course of this year. When we look at what their plan is, you can see that the numbers are declining, each one at various levels. Over the course of every amount of supplementary estimates, those numbers will be clearer and clearer.

But every ministry, agency, and Crown corporation is assigned an amount to have to find. There are very few exceptions.

Senator Batters: That is not really a great way to have to look at things. Didn't we just get this bill a few days ago? I recall you saying that the departmental plan was actually just tabled on Tuesday, I think, when Senator LaBoucane-Benson brought in that box of documents.

Anyway, I will move on to another one, since I don't seem to be making headway here.

You mentioned Health Canada at $10.4 billion. You said that that includes improvements on mental health care and substance abuse care. What types of specifics are there for those two important items: mental health care and substance abuse care?

Senator Pupatello: Thank you.

I will endeavour to get a complete list of them, because I think they are all in that.

I want to go back to your previous question. The actual table of documents has been available to the public and to senators for weeks. You have been here longer than I have, so you probably know that process a lot better than I do. I, as well as committee members and all members of the House, have had access to it for weeks so that we could go into that level of detail and leave our tab marks, et cetera.

Every ministry is looking for ways to save as well as to prioritize the focus of this government. When it comes to funding the $23 billion, for example, assigned to Indigenous Services Canada, there are various levels of related amounts. For Health Canada, there are amounts related to drug and substantial abuse. All of those have been identified.

I will send you the pages that will give you as much of a breakdown as I have.

Senator Batters: On mental health care and substance abuse, can you give us any examples of what the government is spending that on? Frankly, I didn't hear a lot about that when the minister was here yesterday in terms of specifics. This is a lot of money. It would be nice if we had some actual specifics before we are asked to vote on this.

Senator Pupatello: Thank you.

I wasn't sure what the question was in that commentary, but, again, I will endeavour to show you that for the Department of Health, for example, in Part 2 on page 82, the bill identifies the complete amount of operating expenditures of over $4 billion, capital expenditures of $22 million, grants and contributions, the amount voted and the statutory amount. It actually gives those.

Then, in the second part, it breaks it down completely. Rather than me flipping through the pages here, I will find them and send them to your office. Thank you.

Senator Batters: I have one final question, then, while I wait for all the page flipping.

On the public debt charges, when you were whipping through all of these massive amounts, many billions of dollars, at the end there you were listing what this amount was and this amount was. What amount did you state was for public debt charges this year?

Senator Pupatello: Again, that amount and the details are in the budget document we received last November, the budget bill that was then tabled weeks later and also in all of the data we have had for some time. I think it is fair to say that all of these are estimates, even the program expenditures planned for $502 billion; that may be the number that eventually lands. We know that is why they are called estimates: They estimate what they are likely to spend; they do not know. Priorities could change, as they have in the area of defence, which I know has been a focus for you in looking at those numbers. Clearly, we are spending more in that area.

Senator Batters: Senator, I am just asking you to repeat the public debt charges amount. You said it in your speech, and I said that it was at a time in your speech when you were ripping through a number of many multi-billion-dollar amounts. I'm just wondering what the amount is that you stated near the end of your speech for public debt charges.

Senator Pupatello: I am trying to flip through on my Mac to give you all of those numbers again. That said, I could begin at the very beginning and go through my speech again, if you would prefer. I'm afraid I can't, but I will send it to you in a moment rather than to keep the whole house waiting.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I am happy to rise and speak to Bill C-24, the appropriation bill associated with the Main Estimates for 2026-27.

Only a Liberal can say to us that decreasing spending while increasing investments at the same time is a wonderful thing when, at the end of the bottom line of that exercise, we end up with billions and billions of dollars of deficit and debt such that we have never seen before in this place. Those of us who have been here a long time have never seen estimates where you are spending close to $90 billion for a few months.

Senator Martin: Three months.

Senator Housakos: It is really staggering when you think about it, colleagues.

This is the second supply bill we are considering this week, and as with the supplementary estimates, this bill was also preceded by an estimates document called the *Government Expenditure Plan and Main Estimates (Parts I and II)*. The estimates are the government's projection of its spending for the entire year. They set out the spending authorities being sought and the details that support those requests. They lay out the government's expected spending needs for the coming fiscal year, and they are the starting point for parliamentary supply in each fiscal year.

The 2026-27 Main Estimates present a total of $502-plus billion in budgetary spending, which reflects $230.4 billion to be voted and $272.4 billion in forecasted statutory expenditures. Non-budgetary expenditures of $2.9 billion are also reported. Six organizations are each seeking more than $10 billion in voted budgetary expenditures. They include the Department of National Defence at $48.4 billion, Indigenous Services Canada at $23.9 billion, Employment and Social Development Canada at $13.6 billion, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada at $11.8 billion, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat at $11.8 billion and Health Canada at $10.4 billion.

When you look at where the money is going, the largest component of total spending is simply transfer payments, which account for $300.5 billion, or about 60% of expenditures. These are payments made to other levels of government, other organizations and individuals. It is not very complicated; even a simple guy like me can understand that. Operating and capital expenditures account for another $148.6 billion, which is about 30% of total expenditures. However, it is important to note that references to "capital" expenditures in the Main Estimates do not mean the same thing as when the government uses the word. In the Main Estimates, the usage is based on Canadian public sector accounting standards and matches reporting in Volume II of the Public Accounts of Canada. When the government uses the words "capital" or "capital budgeting framework," their use doesn't match anything other than their own made-up definition, honourable colleagues.

If their objective is to create confusion, they are off to a fantastic start.

It is interesting to note that out of the $502.8 billion in total expenditures, only $14.7 billion are related to Budget 2025. In other words, the overwhelming majority of what Parliament is being asked to finance in these Main Estimates does not arise from new budget announcements at all but from the government's existing spending commitments. They have been unrolling now for a very long time. That is significant because it reminds us that the real story in the Main Estimates is not simply what is new but what has already become embedded, normalized and built into the ongoing machinery of government.

However, to get the complete picture of anticipated expenditures for this coming fiscal year, we need to add in the items that are not included in the estimates, most notably Employment Insurance benefits at $31.9 billion, the Canada Child Benefit at $31 billion, and other tax credits and repayments at $14.3 billion. In addition, there is $15.9 billion in net revenue and a $7.6-billion adjustment for accrual and other accounting differences.

• (1740)

Altogether, after incorporating the reductions from the government's comprehensive expenditure review, which, as confirmed by the sponsor of the bill, they are still looking for, and we know how good this government has been at finding savings, it comes to a projected expenditure of $588.3 billion for this fiscal year, and it includes a deficit. The number is $63.5 billion. That is the number.

To fund the voted spending set out in these estimates, the president of the Treasury Board will bring forward two supply bills. In March, Parliament was asked to grant an interim supply, which gives the government authority to draw part of the voted amounts from the Consolidated Revenue Fund so that it can continue operating during the opening months of the fiscal year. This is the bill before us, colleagues.

Senator Martin: Three months.

Senator Housakos: Three months. All of that money.

Senator Martin: Actually, four months.

Senator Housakos: Then, in June, Parliament was asked to grant full supply, which provides the balance of the voted authorities set out in the Main Estimates.

It is important to understand, however, that Parliament does not approve the Main Estimates with this vote today. The Main Estimates are tabled as the government's detailed spending plan and are referred for study. Parliament votes on the appropriation bills that are based on those estimates. In other words, the estimates are the explanatory document; the appropriation acts are the legal instruments that actually provide the authority to spend.

This distinction matters because interim supply should not be confused with full parliamentary endorsement of everything contained in the Main Estimates. Rather, interim supply is, first and foremost, a practical mechanism to keep government functioning while Parliament continues its examination of the estimates. It is a partial and time-limited authority to spend, not a final judgment on the whole spending plan.

God knows what else is coming. Colleagues, need I remind you that there is not an economist in Canada who is saying right now — for a variety of reasons, it doesn't matter what they are — that the economy is on solid footing? They are all saying that we are living through precarious economic times. If you do not have the guardrails and if the shelves and the cabinet are not ready for possible storms that can arise, these numbers are just the beginning of what could be facing us in a few months, six months or a year.

This year, the Main Estimates consist of 258 pages detailing $230 billion in voted spending and $272 billion in statutory spending spread over 130 different government organizations.

It is a nearly impossible task to properly scrutinize this. We partially compensate for this by authorizing our Standing Senate Committee on National Finance to study the Main Estimates up to the end of the calendar year, but even that timeframe is inadequate because the Main Estimates are large, sprawling and difficult to examine in any truly comprehensive way.

Even Senator Marshall acknowledged to me over the last few weeks that this has gotten so out of hand that it is impossible for any senator, their office or any one of our groups to be able, in a proper way, to scrutinize this. Although our Finance Committee does a standup job under difficult circumstances, the sheer size and complexity of the estimates mean that even diligent committee work cannot produce anything resembling an exhaustive examination of every line item.

This challenge becomes greater with each passing year as government spending continues to grow at levels that are unprecedented. This year, the 2026-27 Main Estimates present a total of $502.8 billion in budgetary spending. Less than a decade ago, in 2017-18, eight years ago, the Main Estimates total was roughly $258 billion. Most of you were here in 2017-18. You should be just as concerned as I am with what is happening in just a short period of seven or eight years.

In other words, the government's opening spending plan has nearly doubled in less than 10 years. Whatever the explanation for that growth, it is not a trivial development. It tells us that the scale of the federal state is changing in a way that Parliament should not simply accept without deep and considerable reflection.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, earlier I said that 60% of spending goes to transfers and 30% to operating expenses and investment. However, I want to finish with the remaining 10%, which is the most important portion. What do Canadians get for that 10%? The answer is: nothing.

For that $54 billion, Canadians get nothing. No programs, no services, no infrastructure. That money does not go to health — contrary to what Senator Pupatello said — to defence, to housing or to investment. It is not transferred to the provinces, territories or municipalities. Why is that? It's because that final 10% is the cost of interest on the national debt. It's the money we pay to borrow money. That is the reality.

I've said it before, but it bears repeating: This is no small expense. At $54 billion, it is more than we spend on National Defence, more than we spend on Indigenous Services and, unfortunately, more than we spend on Health Canada.

[*English*]

If that doesn't concern you, colleagues — and it is not a laughing matter — it should and it will. It is just a matter of time.

Over the last 10 years, from 2017 to 2026, we have paid out $327 billion in interest.

Senator Martin: Oh, my goodness.

Senator Housakos: That's $327 billion in interest in only 10 years.

Senator Martin: A lost decade.

Senator Housakos: Over the last 40 years, from 1987 to 2026, the total we have paid in interest on our national debt has come to $1.4 trillion. In today's dollars, that is the equivalent of $2.2 trillion. That is money we'll never see again. That is money that could have been used in other investments that would have had a return on investment.

That is money we could have spent on health care and transfer payments to make sure that 7 million Canadians are not having a hard time finding a doctor.

We're senators. It is easy to say that health is not in our jurisdiction, but how many friends and family have called you looking for a family doctor? I receive calls all the time.

Senator Martin: Too many.

Senator Housakos: But, colleagues, to make things worse, this government has made it clear that it has no intention of balancing the budget. At this point, they have only committed to keeping the deficit-to-GDP ratio on a declining level, which means that, 40 years from now, depending on whether the deficit declines at the rate shown in the Budget 2025 projections, or if it falls just enough to stay within the parameters of the fiscal anchor — I'm not exaggerating this; it is within the parameters of what the government leader says to me every day when he answers questions — we will have paid out an additional $3.5 trillion to $5.7 trillion in interest payments. Do you know how many James Bay Projects that could be? Do you know how many pipelines that could build? Do you know how many hospitals that could build across this country?

What that means, colleagues, is that we are no longer talking about debt as some abstract accounting concept. We are talking about a growing claim on public resources that produces nothing new for Canadians but steadily reduces the room available for everything else. Every year that we choose to run these humongous deficits, we are not simply shifting costs forward in the most abstract way. We are committing future taxpayers to pay for today's excess with interest, whilst narrowing the government's ability to respond to crises and priorities that have yet to arrive, which invariably will.

Today, I expect this chamber will approve Bill C-24, which grants an interim supply of $86.4 billion to the government, but I sincerely hope that we do not mistake that limited approval for an endorsement of the broader fiscal direction set out in these Main Estimates, which is coming, colleagues. It is incumbent on all of us to take a step back and reflect before the catastrophe arrives.

To do so would be failing future generations and leaving them with a diminished inheritance rather than a country with fiscal room to meet the challenges that they will face. It is our

responsibility as legislators to meet tomorrow's challenges today. If we don't do that, we fail in our duty to the Canadians that put us here and pay us to be here.

For all those reasons that I highlighted, that is why His Majesty's official opposition is compelled to put it on record — because we want future generations to see that we were here — that we said no to this type of irresponsible spending.

Thank you, colleagues.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

• (1750)

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: I wonder if Senator Housakos would take a question.

Senator Housakos: With pleasure.

Senator McPhedran: Senator Housakos, do you know where the interest goes? Who benefits from the billions that this country pays in interest?

Senator Housakos: We know it is not Canadians, and we know it is creditors. Senator McPhedran, we also do know — I have a basic knowledge of economics — most of those creditors are foreign bondholders. They are not Canadian institutions.

Senator Pupatello: Would Senator Housakos take a question?

Senator Housakos: With pleasure.

Senator Pupatello: Thank you. When I was speaking a moment earlier and I listed several figures — $88.8 billion in elderly benefits, $53.7 billion in public debt, $27.2 billion in equalization payments, $17.9 billion in the Canada Social Transfer — I wonder which of those you would agree not to spend in this current climate.

Senator Housakos: Senator Pupatello, you weren't listening to my speech. Those are statutory expenditures that have nothing to do with the Main Estimates.

Senator Pupatello: You can get that on the record.

Senator Housakos: No, but you can get it on the record all you want. The problem is that it is not increases — not for Indigenous communities, and it is not increases to the transfer for health payments whatsoever.

The increases of what we're putting into place here in this bill are for the three months to cover, basically, debt. That's what we're doing. All the monies you have talked about that have been allocated for all of those important things were not allocated by these estimates. They have been in the budget now for a while. It is operational money that has already been put in place in the past. That is what I'm talking about. After the smoke and mirrors is all done, we're not increasing spending on health care. Just ask your colleagues at Queen's Park.

Senator Martin: Just on the debt servicing.

Senator Housakos: Quite the contrary — we're not increasing spending for Indigenous, First Nations people, not at all. We're increasing by $84 billion-$85 billion in spending where more than three quarters of that or two thirds of that will go to pay the interest on the debt that this irresponsible government has run up over 10 years. I'm happy to answer.

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Would Senator Housakos take a question?

Senator Housakos: With pleasure. You know that I have unlimited time. I could really stop this bill from passing.

Senator Loffreda: I do not know if you agree with me, but two thirds of the Canadian debt is held domestically, and one third by foreign investors. Would you agree with that? Where is your research from?

Senator Housakos: First of all, most of the bondholders of our debt are foreign, from what I understand, Senator Loffreda. Obviously, we have some domestic debt that we carry here, but, with all due respect, most of those that hold Canadian bonds when we print our money, my understanding has always been that they are foreign debt bondholders. I do not know where you are getting your information. Can you share it with us?

Senator Loffreda: I will send it to you.

Domestic holders include the Bank of Canada, and that is 17%; pension funds and insurance account for 15%; banks, mutual funds and other financial institutions are the remaining portion, and the Canadian chartered banks are only a subset of that domestic 65%. When we do talk about interest, it is important to know that there is a cost to money. That interest isn't going fully as profits to the bondholders or to the banks, right? There is a cost to funds.

But two thirds of Canadian debt is held by Canadians. That is the research. And I can share it with you.

The Hon. the Speaker: Was there a question? Senator Loffreda, do you have a question?

Senator Loffreda: Just a fact. Maybe you could share that with me, and I am very interested in that.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I want to make sure that only one person speaks at a time. Senator Loffreda, could you repeat your question?

[*English*]

Senator Loffreda: Based on what I'm saying, would you agree that the majority of our debt is domestically held?

Senator Housakos: I will do some research on that. But on the numbers you just threw at me in terms of what debt is being held by Canadian banks and the Bank of Canada, you are at 42%. With all due respect, you said 11% for the Bank of Canada and you quoted something like 30-some per cent that is held by Canadian financial institutions. Senator Loffreda, that is 42%.

Senator Loffreda: I did say —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Loffreda, are you on debate?

Senator Loffreda: No, no. I am on a question.

The Hon. the Speaker: Are you asking a question?

Senator Loffreda: Yes. Okay, I will ask a question.

I don't know if you heard it properly, but I did say banks, mutual funds and other financial institutions hold the remaining portion. So it doesn't add up, but the remaining portion —

Senator Housakos: What you were saying —

Senator Loffreda: The Bank of Canada is 17%, right? Pension funds and insurance is 15%. That's 32%. And the remaining part is banks, mutual funds and other financial institutions. That's the remaining portion. That adds up to 100%. Would you agree that does add up to 100%?

Senator Housakos: I don't know how you are counting that. But I've heard for the Bank of Canada and the Canadian banks you came up with a number that's around 35%. Then you're saying the remaining part is being held by a bunch of institutions, and you want me to believe in what you are putting on the floor here, without telling me which ones hold the remaining portion that brings you to two thirds. I would be happy to do that research if you'd like and have that debate, but you did not come up with two thirds there that I can quantify as Canadian institutions.

Furthermore, you also know, as a former banker, that there is a debt load that banks hold that is also in partnership with foreign entities, correct?

Correct, Senator Loffreda.

So that is very hard to determine, as you come out of the blue saying the Royal Bank holds X amount and Canadian financial institutions — where Canadian banks themselves are leveraged, very often, by international investors.

Pension funds — the FTQ is leveraged, very often, by international investors and foreign bondholders, right? That is a reality as well.

So, no, I completely disagree. When you take into account all of those realities on investments, bondholders — of even some of the Canadian pension funds and Canadian institutions — no way will that add up that Canada and Canadians have the capacity to hold three quarters of the debt we're carrying right now.

We are a country, Senator Loffreda, that a few years ago, when we rebuilt the Champlain Bridge, we did not have financial institutions in Canada that were able to finance a $10-billion project, including yours, the Royal Bank. We had to go to foreign investors in Europe, in Spain, to build a simple bridge at $10 billion, and you think that two thirds of the Canadian debt right now is being carried by Canadian institutions? We will have that debate. There will be an opportunity.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Gignac, do you have a question?

Hon. Clément Gignac: It would be a point of order.

As I listen to this debate, it seems to have no bearing on Bill C-24. If we start talking about statistics I'll join the debate too, because I think I know the issue fairly well.

I would ask that the discussion be limited to Bill C-24, and that we not debate numbers, in which case we would lose a few people and I'd have to intervene to correct certain facts.

[*English*]

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

An Hon. Senator: Question.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. the Speaker: Concerning the point of order, I gave Senator Loffreda some time to ask questions.

However, we do allow some latitude when it comes to questions and answers.

If there are no further questions or if no one else wishes to speak, I'll ask the usual question. Are there any other questions or does anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

Are senators ready for the question?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

[*English*]

All those in favour of the motion will please say "yea."

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker: In my opinion the "yeas" have it.

And two honourable senators having risen:

The Hon. the Speaker: I see two senators rising. Is there an agreement on the length of a bell?

Some Hon. Senators: Now.

The Hon. the Speaker: I wish to remind senators there has to be an agreement; otherwise, it is an hour.

I will ask the question again. Is there an agreement on the length of a bell?

Hon. Senators: Fifteen minutes.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Leave is granted. The vote will take place at 6:14 p.m. Call in the senators.

• (1810)

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

YEAS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Adler
Arnold
Arnot
Aucoin
Black
Boehm
Boudreau
Cardozo
Clement
Cormier
Coyle
Deacon (*Nova Scotia*)
Deacon (*Ontario*)
Downe
Duncan
Forest
Gerba
Gignac
Harder
Henkel
Karetak-Lindell
Kingston
Klyne
LaBoucane-Benson
Loffreda
McBean
McNair
McPhedran
Miville-Dechêne
Moncion
Moreau
Muggli
Osler
Oudar
Pate
Petitclerc
Petten
Pupatello
Quinn
Ravalia
Ringuette
Robinson
Ross
Saint-Germain
Surette
Verner
Wells (*Alberta*)
Wilson
Youance
Yussuff—51

MacAdam

NAYS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Ataullahjan
Batters
Carignan
Housakos
MacDonald
Martin
McCallum
Smith
Wells (*Newfoundland and Labrador*)—9

ABSTENTIONS
THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Nil

• (1820)

CONNECTED CARE FOR CANADIANS BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Kingston, seconded by the Honourable Senator Moncion, for the second reading of Bill S-5, An Act respecting the interoperability of health information technology and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors.

Hon. Colin Deacon: Honourable senators, we live in a world in which your phone can unlock your car but your cardiologist can't access your heart health data, even when you want them to. For this and many other reasons I will mention, I want to thank Senator Kingston for her sponsorship of Bill S-5, the connected care for Canadians act.

I am thrilled to speak to this bill because it is a critical piece of legislation intended to address the fragmentation of health data across our country. It reflects an understanding of the need to prioritize legislation that will benefit the health of Canadians and the health of our economy.

Bill S-5 mandates that vendors of health technology implement pan-Canadian interoperability standards and prohibits them from blocking access to data. This is very similar to a bill from the last Parliament, Bill C-294, which Jeremy Patzer in the House of Commons sponsored and which was an excellent move in this direction. This is an important one, very specifically around health data.

This fragmentation is problematic because it results in health data being siloed and scattered across health service providers who use incompatible systems and devices. It blocks access to data, limiting access to personal health information that could be used to continuously improve our health care system, ultimately creating opportunities for patients, health care professionals, provider organizations and — dear to my heart — Canada's incredible innovators. Medical equipment manufacturers who build closed ecosystems by default are creating walled gardens of data and, consequently, data monopolies.

Further, access to disaggregated data sets is limited, which is an enormous loss for Canada because these are hidden gems that can help to identify underserved populations and highlight opportunities for improvement.

Bill S-5 seeks to improve patient safety, reduce administrative burdens for clinicians and stimulate digital health innovation by facilitating the seamless and secure exchange of electronic health information.

Why is the health information of Canadians valued globally? It is important to note that we are very special in that regard because the comprehensive and complete nature of Canada's universal, single-payer health system means that our data captures nearly the entire population, while many other countries have fragmented private systems that limit full care to insured and high-income groups. The fact that we have a single-payer system across the country makes our health data even more valuable.

It's longitudinal. Provinces have been collecting health records for decades, creating data trails that allow researchers to track health outcomes, disease progression and the effects of interventions over lifetimes, something rare and enormously useful in medical research.

With respect to population diversity, Canada's large and diverse population makes its health data valuable for studying how genetics, environment, social determinants and other issues interact across and within ethnic and cultural groups. I heard Senator Senior ask a question of Minister Michel yesterday on that specific issue. It is an important one.

Further, in terms of trusted data governance, though there is no question that PIPEDA is out of date and desperately in need of an update, Canada is seen as a stable rule-of-law jurisdiction with established privacy frameworks, making our data more trusted by international research partners and companies compared to data from weaker jurisdictions.

Canadian health data is attractive not just to academic researchers but also pharmaceutical companies, medical device firms, insurers and health AI companies. That is why we must address urgent policy questions around consent, data sovereignty, commercialization and whether and how health data is allowed to be exported.

What do I mean when I speak about the current state of health data fragmentation? Canada's health data system is characterized by silos and technological barriers. Let me provide you with some data points to drive this home.

Despite 95% of physicians using electronic data systems, a lack of connectivity has resulted in paper and fax referrals remaining common to this day. In terms of patient access, only 39% of Canadians have access to their own electronic health information. Only 29% of physicians have exchanged patient records with practices outside their own. That means we're not getting that data sharing that is so essential to collaboration in a field where we have so many specialists across the entire spectrum of our needs.

A frightening 44% of physicians report experiencing burnout, often linked to the massive administrative burdens that we are placing on health care service providers. Only 7% of providers have adopted the use of AI in their practice. I'm going to provide some examples of where functional AI can be really valuable in health care.

In addition, given Canada's vast geography, improved connectivity and access to electronic personal health data are essential if we want to promote equity for Canadians in remote, underserved and vulnerable communities.

Specifically, Bill S-5 serves as a federal backstop, applying only in jurisdictions that lack substantially similar requirements. It targets health IT vendors. These are the corporations or individuals licensing or selling digital health solutions. Bill S-5 does not target health care providers or patients.

The bill focuses on protecting electronic health information, which encompasses electronic personal health information, regardless of whether it has been de-identified. The definition section of the bill defines "personal health information" as information concerning an individual's physical or mental health, details regarding health services provided to that individual, data concerning the donation of body parts or substances for testing derived from them and information collected incidentally during the provision of health services. The bill establishes mandatory interoperability standards for vendors and prohibits data-blocking practices.

Under clause 6, vendors will be prohibited from delaying, obstructing or degrading data access or exchange. That is what is happening today. That is what our Canadian researchers, innovators, physicians and patients are dealing with. The standards will be prescribed nationally.

Bill S-5 will operate within the bounds of federal, provincial and territorial privacy laws. The bill will also give regulators the power of enforcement to amend definitions, specify technical interoperability standards and establish an administrative monetary policy regime to enforce compliance while developing a complaint and investigation process.

That agility is really important in order for us to make progress in this area, and that can be done as we learn.

Lastly, in clause 9, Bill S-5 allows for "incorporation by reference," which means allowing for regulations to update automatically when technical standards change, providing the flexibility and agility needed in this rapidly evolving technology sector.

That is something we need across government: more incorporation of industry voluntary standards by reference. That's on the cutting edge of modernizing our regulatory regimes and making them more agile.

What opportunities will be created? Colleagues, it is estimated that connected digital health systems could save Canada up to $4 billion annually. I found this number to be quite small, actually, because it's only 1% of Canada's total health care expenditures, which were expected to total about $400 billion last year.

However, the initial savings are only one of several benefits. We cannot begin to predict the magnitude of solutions and benefits that will be created once Canada's incredible innovators are finally provided with the opportunity to address our biggest and most pervasive challenges.

• (1830)

I say this, not based on faith, but because of the years I've had the benefit of seeing astonishingly innovative solutions to pervasive problems that Canadian innovators can create and scale.

Just earlier this year, I had the privilege of meeting with about a dozen incredible Canadian health technology companies as part of the INOVAIT network. INOVAIT is Canada's national network for image-guided therapy and artificial intelligence, or AI. Established in 2020, INOVAIT is supported by the Strategic Response Fund and is hosted by the Sunnybrook Research Institute in Toronto. Their member companies made it clear that adopting Bill S-5 would have tremendous benefits.

I want to give you four examples of companies that I got to know when I visited that session about a month ago.

In terms of Canadian-based AI, I spoke to practising radiologists who were co-founders of 16 BIT, a Toronto-based company. They routinely use captured X-rays to opportunistically identify patients who are at risk of osteoporosis. This has resulted in early identification and treatment that have helped over 500,000 Canadians at a very early stage.

They take X-rays that you have already had for whatever purposes, and they review them to see if there are signs of osteoporosis. The beauty of this work is that it provides early identification that may not have been triggered by symptoms because osteoporosis cannot be reversed, but the decline can be slowed. The earlier it is identified, the better. This is a really important example of how we can use our data to improve patient health and reduce the cost of health care.

16 BIT points out that vendors "hold data hostage" and implement integration costs and other access fees that "effectively put a tax on innovation."

They point out that Bill S-5 would allow companies to "compete based on the quality of [their] AI" and their technology "rather than the depth of [their] pockets." I think that sums it up really well. Let's give Canadian innovators a chance to use our data to help Canadians. These innovators have dramatically helped to improve patient care.

I want to talk about MIMOSA Diagnostics in Halifax. We all like mimosas, but this is a little different. This company was developed by a Halifax-based plastic surgeon. Her technology identified the risk of bed sores below the surface of the skin, enabling targeted, preventative efforts that deliver profound improvements to patient outcomes along with reductions in the cost of patient care.

She offered the opinion that Bill S-5 will lower ". . . the barrier to entry, allowing homegrown Canadian companies to integrate, scale, and compete globally."

MIMOSA Diagnostics indicated that interoperability will ensure ". . . that a patient's health data travels as fast as their diagnosis, regardless of where they live."

The benefits of innovation will help push all organizations to accurately structure clean data. Toronto-based Altis Labs said that ". . . structural cleanliness [of data] is the bedrock of trustworthy AI."

"Garbage in, garbage out" has always been the saying around technology, and this is a way to really drive that good quality data into the system — good quality Canadian data that provides benefits globally, because of, as I said, the complete and comprehensive nature of our data.

They go on to say that requiring ". . . health IT vendors to adopt common standards will significantly improve the depth and connectivity . . ." of data and help ensure that ". . . data flows at the pace of innovation."

Halifax-based Sound Blade Medical believes that Bill S-5 will ". . . accelerate development, improve model robustness, and limit barriers to regulatory approval."

Lastly, we must keep Canadian innovations Canadian. This is such an important thing. We create the best ideas. We build the best early-stage companies, but just as they are starting to race ahead, unfortunately, they leave the country because we don't have the procurement, and we don't have the capital to help them to grow. All the benefits, then, leave the country and are realized by others. This will provide some real help on the way.

A few weeks ago, I referenced CAN Health Network in a senator's statement, specifically relating to their support for Virtual Hallway, which reduces the need for family physician referrals to specialists. Virtual Hallway is a Halifax-based company that dramatically improves communication between primary care physicians and specialists, and their platform now includes more than 10,000 physicians, and referrals to specialists have dropped by 84%.

CAN Health is another nationally funded initiative that can introduce and scale made-in-Canada solutions and benefit from the existence of Bill S-5.

I also wanted to point out that, just last weekend in the *Toronto Star*, a university health network team identified that the use of our smart watches — Apple watches — can predict heart failure, a full week before patients land in the hospital. This is a dramatic change. Rather than at the moment of crisis, you can actually receive the care you need based on the evidence that you are walking around with every day. Again, health data, interoperability and the ability to access this data are massively important.

Like virtually all legislation that we review, there are concerns that would very much benefit from our committee's evaluation of this bill, and these include the following two that I will cite: First, what existing laws may prohibit access, use and exchange of personal health information?

I want to consider Ontario's 20-year-old Personal Health Information Protection Act, or PHIPA. I encourage the committee to look at the responsibilities of what they call a "health information custodian" under PHIPA. For those of you who receive care in Ontario, there is a very long list of legal gatekeepers to your health data. Bill S-5, section 5(2)(a), explicitly defers to provincial statutes the very laws that may currently prevent health information exchange.

I'm sure that this can be managed, but it is important for us to understand whether factors like this have been considered when it comes to the implementation of Bill S-5, if it does, in fact, become law — and I hope it does.

According to Bill S-5, health information technology is only interoperable if it:

> . . . allows the user to easily, completely and securely access and use all electronic health information and exchange all electronic health information with other health information technologies, unless any applicable federal, provincial or territorial law on the protection of personal health information prohibits that access, use and exchange;

That is where the challenge may arise.

As an aside, I wish our federal political parties had been working together to create a unified exclusive privacy regime to oversee our personal health information. It would have been great if they had been working on that, rather than on how they handle their own political party data, but I digress.

We need to ensure that issues like those in PHIPA define "health information custodian" very seriously because of the issue of liability. If there is no legal right and responsibility for an organization to share personal health information, and that's not exceedingly clear, then that right will not be exercised. The liability concerns are simply too great.

There is some good news in this regard. Division 23 of Part 5 of Bill C-15, as you heard me speak about earlier, finally grants Canadians data mobility rights once these rights become law under the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA, and the bureaucrats — as I said — have confirmed that they intend to support the application of these rights in all fields where appropriate data sharing safeguards are in place. There is a real issue for our committee study to look into there.

The second question I would love for them to look into is this: Does Bill S-5 consider the most up-to-date approaches to protect Canadians from cybersecurity breaches? We have all seen and felt the effects of the large cybersecurity breaches of health care data that have occurred across Canada, including ones that literally shut down the delivery of health care services in some regions.

We need to be concerned about the possibility that Bill S-5 might create even larger, more centralized databases that are even more connected with the possibility of being even more vulnerable.

There are solutions to this problem. I am far from an expert in this regard. For example, the release of party platforms during 2025 finally delivered an all-party consensus on the use of digital credentials and decentralized identifiers. Stronger, non-mandatory identity and information controls in the hands of users would give them the ability to log in to access and share their personal information using cryptographic keys that they personally hold, not credentials that an institution issues to them.

I want to thank my parliamentary colleagues and the Conservative Party of Canada for this important change to their platform.

To ensure that Canadians have robust cybersecurity protections, we need to consider the need for further legislation. We're hearing rumours and rumblings, Senator McNair, that Bill C-8 will emerge in our chamber any day now, and thank goodness for that. We've received it? Hallelujah. It is the first of a whole lot of work we need to do on cybersecurity. I am very happy to hear that.

• (1840)

To conclude, Bill S-5 will benefit from being critically examined at committee. I have only asked two questions — what existing laws may prohibit access, use and exchange of personal health information, and does Bill S-5 take into consideration the most up-to-date approaches to protect Canadians from cybersecurity breaches? — but there most certainly are more.

Colleagues, health data, like all other data, should be controlled by individuals who create it. You should be able to choose if you share your health data with a specific medical practitioner for a specific purpose and be able to easily and securely port this data anywhere and to any device you choose.

It is fabulous that the content in Bill S-5 relates to health data, but we also urgently need to modernize our general consumer data laws, like PIPEDA, and our public data laws, like the Privacy Act. This government is moving in exactly the right direction with this bill, and I look forward to supporting this and further legislation in this direction. Thank you, colleagues.

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Would Senator Deacon take a quick question?

Senator C. Deacon: With trepidation.

Senator Osler: Thank you, Senator Deacon. In your speech, I noted that you said that interoperable health records could result in $4 billion annually in savings. Do you have any details on where those savings would come from, or could you point me to the source so that I can find out the details?

Senator C. Deacon: I will absolutely point you to the source — not particularly at this second — but it was the only data I could find where a study had been done. For me, the number did not resonate in any way, shape or form because I can see tremendous benefits and savings with a reduction in the duplication of tests. There are a number of ways in which immediately you can intuitively see benefits. I don't know that there is a good number out there, but I will share what I have and look forward to your thoughts and further discussion. Thank you.

Hon. Marilou McPhedran: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill S-5, the Connected Care for Canadians Act, in co-operation with Senator Mary Jane McCallum, on behalf of the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba.

This bill represents an important opportunity to improve how health information is managed in this country, but it also raises deep concerns, particularly for First Nations People in Manitoba whose data has been misused, mishandled or simply overlooked for generations. This bill focuses on interoperability, data blocking, vendor accountability and the modernization of health information systems. These goals are worthy, but I have learned from the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba that none of these goals can be met without a distinctions-based approach that respects First Nations' data sovereignty and the complex realities of utilizing digital health systems in First Nations in Manitoba.

Interoperability, senators, has been a promise made many times before, one that has routinely fallen short in First Nations communities.

Today, I am honoured to be the conveyor of this information from the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba: Attempts at interoperability have failed because systems were never built with First Nations ownership, First Nations connectivity or governance in mind. Communities cannot benefit from systems they cannot access, especially when connectivity in northern and remote regions remains unreliable.

A significant advancement in this bill is the requirement for vendor accountability. Historically, vendors have operated without the responsibility of ensuring that their systems connect to others. This has created monopolies over First Nations' health data that limit access, delay care and prevent First Nations from exercising authority over their own information. Ensuring vendors are held accountable is not merely a technical matter; it is an ethical one.

Bill S-5 must first define how interoperability will take place. Operating without a standard kit or format for data creates significant risks to maliciously subvert or frustrate recipients of the data.

Further, an exploratory committee that includes First Nations expert representation must be struck to determine what standard would be used between health care vendors, and may I suggest that this organization would make an excellent witness for committee.

The bill must prescribe clear and enforceable timelines for data transfer so that information is not left in a perpetual state of transit, where it becomes unusable to those who need it most. I report to senators that the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba has serious concerns around data misuse, particularly by third-party vendors who have been known to sell or share First Nations' health information with external bodies. This bill must be strengthened to ensure that such actions are explicitly prohibited, monitored and penalized.

Non-profit facilities have rules and guiding principles as to how to use their patients' data, and forcing the transmission to for-profit centres could be mandating the wholesale monetization of peoples' health care data without an avenue of disclosure over what will happen once the transfer completes. For vendors that operate in different jurisdictions, this bill doesn't provide direction or stipulate if the originating jurisdiction should have priority. The risks of patient data monetization overshadowing patient care must be meaningfully mitigated.

Honourable colleagues, any discussion about health data must recognize the centrality of the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access and possession, or OCAP. The First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba reminded us that First Nations' data sovereignty is not an aspiration; it is a living practice.

First Nations-led data lodges are being developed across the country to ensure communities can repatriate, govern and use their own health data. These efforts honour jurisdiction, uphold inherent rights and improve health outcomes.

In respect of OCAP and data governance principles, the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba prioritizes digital health software solution systems and infrastructure that operate within the borders of Canada, honouring a principle that First Nations' data remains in Canada, governed by Canadian legislation and protections.

During COVID-19, the Health Information Research Governance Committee in Manitoba demonstrated what ethical, distinctions-based oversight looks like. They ensured rapid access to data during a crisis but always in a way that protected First Nations' governance, culture, identity and integrity. That same lens must be applied to Bill S-5 — another reason to call upon this organization as a witness when it reaches committee.

We also heard about data challenges during emergencies, from wildfires to pandemic responses, when the lack of accessible, accurate information left communities without the ability to track who was evacuated, who was vulnerable and who needed urgent support. This is not acceptable in a country with Canada's wealth and technological capacity.

• (1850)

Interoperable systems must ensure that First Nations can access the real-time information required not only to save lives but to protect people's wellness and dignity.

I have been asked to highlight the need for data disaggregation. First Nations, Métis and Inuit are not interchangeable groups. Research that homogenizes them under the label "Indigenous" is ethically and methodologically flawed. Oversight bodies have been clear: Research must distinguish among nations so that solutions reflect the unique needs, experiences and rights of each nation.

From a technical perspective, important progress is already under way. First Nations in Manitoba are actively integrating electronic medical records with provincial systems such as the eChart or the Public Health Information Management System, known as PHIMS. These systems rely on First Nations-owned vendors like Mustimuhw Information Solutions to model First Nations sovereignty in action. But even this progress is hindered by the persistent reality of poor connectivity in northern and remote regions. Cloud-based solutions cannot work without a stable internet. Many communities in Manitoba must still rely on on-premise data storage to ensure privacy, sovereignty and continuity.

As we consider Bill S-5, we must recognize that legislation built for urban bandwidth cannot be implemented in communities that barely have stable access to the internet.

[Senator McPhedran]

Honourable senators, the voices we heard were clear. The bill must move from "may" to "must." It must embed distinctions-based approaches, require First Nations governance and participation and ensure that First Nations data sovereignty is not an afterthought but a foundation.

At its heart, Bill S-5 is about more than technology. It is about power. It is about trust. It is about acknowledging that health data has long been used as a tool of colonial governance and about ensuring that this legislation does not repeat those harms. Today we have the opportunity to build systems where First Nations will inherit a health system that respects them, protects them and recognizes their inherent rights.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, I wish to thank the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba, or FNHSSM, for this brief that I will now read on their behalf:

> First Nation leadership recognized the importance of Data Sovereignty, stating that "Data sovereignty is a cornerstone of nation-rebuilding", and that timely high-quality data is essential to making informed decisions that affect the health, social and economic well-being of our citizens. First Nations Data Sovereignty is important because of the limitations and gaps in any dataset that hide First Nations realities, including the unique histories, contexts, and jurisdictional challenges each Nation faces due to colonial policies and systems. For example, excluding misclassifying, or underreporting First Nations people in data contributes to erasure and assimilation. Furthermore, research uses Western standards of health to measure health, which can misrepresent and perpetuate stereotypes, and these standards do not reflect our strengths, language, or culture. . . .
>
> **Why First Nations Data Governance Lodge in Manitoba and the FNDGS is beneficial:**
>
> Health information about Canadians is not easily accessible to governments, health care professionals, and First Nations, which puts all Canadians at risk in terms of safety, continuity of care, and improvements and innovations in health care. It is imperative that health care professionals have access to the health information of patients in a timely, secure and efficient way to provide continuous care. This is particularly important for First Nations who often must leave their community to access primary care, specialist care and care for chronic diseases and mental health. Furthermore, in rural, northern, and remote communities, access to services is limited by the scarcity of professionals, long distances, and long wait times. These constraints lead to delayed disease identification and incomplete care. This is also important for governments (federal, provincial, and First Nations) to have access to reliable current data to make informed decisions and drive improvements. Finally, it is also important to have a comprehensive, secure health data set to support healthcare innovation and research.

Linkage to Federal Priorities and Current Context

First Nation Data Sovereignty provides essential, strategic support to federal commitments and priorities, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and "Measure 30" of the UNDRIP Act Action Plan, as well as being an integral component of the successful transfer of programs and services to First Nations from the federal government. First Nations Data Sovereignty is also mentioned in many of the documents working towards creating a connected health care system for Canada. First Nations Data Sovereignty is a Nation building investment to have access to First Nations led, relevant, reliable data and information for research, decision making and innovation.

Next Steps and Current Context

The brief continues:

Continued partnerships at the federal and provincial levels are needed to increase access to relevant data and research. For example, the Manitoba First Nation Health Atlas, a collaboration between FNHSSM and the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, will measure health outcomes amongst Manitoba First Nations and the collection and analysis of the Race Ethnicity Identifier data in Manitoba will capture First Nations data within health care settings to improve care by measuring racism and health outcomes of First Nations when they visit emergency rooms in Winnipeg. At the federal level, FNHSSM is one of 10 regions across Canada leading the implementation of the First Nation Regional Health Survey and the development of the Regional Social Survey that will collect data on the well-being of children. FNHSSM is also developing Nations based wellness indicators in First Nation communities.

Areas for consideration to add to Bill S-5: An Act respecting the interoperability of health information technology and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors

Distinction-based data collection is a Requirement — Change word "Indigenous" to "First Nation, Metis and Inuit"

The inability or unwillingness of governments to collect Nation-based identifiers that recognize the First Nations, Metis and Inuit as distinct peoples further undermines the self-determination and autonomy of each Nation, creating data platforms that perpetuate assimilative policies that ignore geographic and jurisdictional challenges in accessing care.

First Nation-specific indicators are also necessary to examine First Nation-specific racism at the system, hospital, care team, patient, family and community levels. As seen in the cases of Jordan Anderson and Brian Sinclair, this paternalistic and colonial attitude can still be seen and felt today as First Nations, Metis and Inuit people attempt to utilize a model of health care that is not their own and undermines their rights to health as a First Nations people with Treaty rights and constitutionally protected rights recognized by the Crown but undermined by health care professionals and bureaucrats who have a narrow and limited scope in adhering to these rights in health policies, often grounded in systemic racism and attitudes.

Bill S-5 needs to include a definition of —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator McCallum, I am sorry. I have to interrupt.

Honourable senators, it is now seven o'clock. Pursuant to rule 3-3(1), I am obliged to leave the chair until eight o'clock, when we will resume, unless it is your wish, honourable senators, to not see the clock.

Is it agreed to not see the clock?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Some Hon. Senators: No.

The Hon. the Speaker: I hear a "no."

Honourable senators, leave was not granted. The sitting is, therefore, suspended, and I will leave the chair until eight o'clock.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

[*Translation*]

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (2000)

ROYAL ASSENT

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

RIDEAU HALL

March 26, 2026

Madam Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, Governor General of Canada, signified

royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 26th day of March, 2026, at 6:50 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Ken MacKillop

Secretary to the Governor General

The Honourable
The Speaker of the Senate
Ottawa

Bills Assented to Thursday, March 26, 2026:

An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025 (*Bill C-15, Chapter 3, 2026*)

An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures (*Bill C-12, Chapter 4, 2026*)

An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026 (*Bill C-23, Chapter 5, 2026*)

An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027 (*Bill C-24, Chapter 6, 2026*)

[*English*]

CONNECTED CARE FOR CANADIANS BILL

SECOND READING

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Kingston, seconded by the Honourable Senator Moncion, for the second reading of Bill S-5, An Act respecting the interoperability of health information technology and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors.

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, they continue:

Bill S-5 needs to include a definition of First Nation Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty is important as we have always protected our way of life, knowledge, culture, language and connection to land and water. We have kept information and data safe and secure, while also making them accessible to those who need them to make decisions, educate the next generation, and adapt knowledge to the current context.

How will Bill S-5 adhere to First Nations principles of OCAP?

It is important to ensure that First Nation Data Sovereignty is considered in Bill S-5 to ensure that First Nations have ownership, access, control and possession over their health care data, benefit from the interoperable data, and that First Nations have free, prior and informed consent for the use of this data at the individual and collective level. It is also necessary to ensure that the unique history, culture and strengths of the First Nation are reflected in the data collected. First Nations will use this data to share their truths, and need data that accurately captures the full picture, including the current context and realities. Without access to reliable data, it is challenging to clearly identify health inequalities, measure the extent, track developments, and, most importantly, address the system's shortcomings to deliver equitable care. This data fragmentation is also reflected in access to care. Access issues disproportionately impact First Nations people, which are compounded by a lack of access to data. Health information technology vendors need to understand and be trained on First Nation data sovereignty to work alongside First Nations to develop the data standards.

How will Bill S-5 protect First Nations data?

First Nations have been working to create a network of First Nation data centres across Canada, governed by First Nations, to ensure timely access to usable, reliable First Nation data. These centres need to ensure the safety and security of First Nation data. First Nations have concerns about data being sold to third parties without consent or knowledge, which is why First Nations must provide oversight and governance over First Nations data, including the data that is being proposed through Bill C-5.

Manitoba First Nations has one of the longest-standing information governance models across Canada, called the Health Information Research Governance Committee (HIRGC), established in the 1990s to oversee regional research. The committee is appointed by First Nation leaders and represents language groups, geographic locations, tribal councils, and regional First Nation organizations, as well as youth, knowledge keepers, and academics. HIRGC reviews applications to access regional First Nation data for research, surveillance and emergency response based on the following principles, which have been endorsed by the 63 First Nations through resolution. (1) Free prior informed consent at the individual and collective level, (2) First Nation ethics which allow for the uniqueness of each community, (3) OCAP, Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession of data, and (4) Benefit to First Nations. This has proven an effective model to ensure First Nations leadership, the provincial and federal governments have access to data to respond to health emergencies such as COVID-19 and wildfires.

Nation-based strengths, looking at what is working in our community, what are the things that make us well, in accordance with our own definitions of wellness. Also, identifying those interruptions to our wellness that have played out over time. Need to account for culture, language, connection to land and waters. This can also include access to traditional foods and medicines, ceremonies, and community connection. This data is important to First Nation communities and for future generations.

Equity – Include wording for vendors to ensure connectivity issues do not exclude communities

Connectivity concerns to ensure that all Canadians are included, regardless of where they live. There are still First Nations communities without access to reliable, secure internet services. Let's ensure our country is connected and that the care we receive does not depend on where it is provided, but that all health care providers and patients have access to the health information they need to provide the best possible care. This also includes information collected in First Nations at health centers and nursing stations, which is housed with Indigenous Services Canada and the First Nations Inuit Health.

Thank you.

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Honourable senators, I rise today as critic of Bill S-5, An Act respecting interoperability of health information technology and to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors, also known as the connected care for Canadians act.

The bill aims to establish a federal framework requiring that health information technology used in participating provinces and territories be interoperable as well as to prohibit data blocking by health information technology vendors.

In simple terms, the goal is to help ensure that electronic health information is available where and when it is needed. By requiring health information technologies be interoperable and by addressing data blocking, the bill aims to support the ability of health systems to share patient information appropriately.

First, allow me to briefly situate where Canada stands today. Compared to other jurisdictions, many have already moved from broad aspirations to more detailed and enforceable frameworks. In the United States, information blocking is defined in law and backed by potentially significant penalties for health IT developers. In Europe, the emerging European Health Data Space establishes requirements for interoperability, security and the use of electronic health data. In England, interoperability obligations are built directly into contractual arrangements with system providers.

• (2010)

While the objective of interoperable health information systems in Canada is not new, Canada has struggled to make it a reality. For more than two decades, governments, auditors and experts have warned that fragmented health information systems prevent patient data from moving efficiently across systems and jurisdictions. As early as 2001, the federal government created Canada Health Infoway to accelerate the development of electronic health records. Nearly a decade later, the Auditor General of Canada examined federal investments in digital health and noted that progress toward interoperable records remained uneven and difficult to measure.

Our own Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology addressed this issue directly in its 2012 report entitled *Time for Transformative Change: A Review of the 2004 Health Accord*. Upon request by the Minister of Health at the time, the committee initiated a parliamentary review of the 10-year plan to strengthen health care. The committee observed that patient health information comes from multiple sources — physicians, hospitals, laboratories and pharmacists — and in order to share that information across regions and jurisdictions, a common and interoperable network must be developed.

The committee proposed 43 recommendations in total, 4 of which concerned interoperability. These included continued federal investment in Canada Health Infoway, the establishment of targets for interoperable electronic health records, increased adoption of electronic medical records by physicians and efforts to address differences in privacy frameworks across jurisdictions.

Of note, colleagues, during the First Session of the Forty-first Parliament, over two years, the Social Affairs Committee released five special study reports, three of which were health related. It's another example of the strength of our committee work to take a step back from legislation and really undertake in-depth studies on various policy questions.

More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Auditor General again highlighted the consequences of fragmented health data systems, noting challenges in obtaining consistent and timely information across jurisdictions.

In other words, the need for interoperable health information systems has been recognized for many years. However, supporting that objective does not relieve Parliament of its responsibility to examine the framework carefully, which brings us to Bill S-5.

First and foremost, when dealing with personal information, such as electronic health information, maintaining public trust remains the most important consideration. At all times, the protection of patients' privacy must be prioritized. Increased data sharing brings inherent risks that must be carefully managed. As health information moves more easily across systems and jurisdictions, the potential for unauthorized access or breaches also increases. These risks underscore the importance of ensuring that strong safeguards are in place so that Canadians can have confidence in how their personal health information is protected.

As it stands right now, Bill S-5 remains largely undefined. The mechanisms used to achieve the objective will be determined by the Governor-in-Council through regulations. Since we are dealing with health, which is a provincial responsibility, it raises some jurisdictional considerations. It also raises two concerns that are interconnected: the implementation of the bill through regulations and the wide regulatory powers delegated by Parliament.

First, there is a jurisdictional dimension to consider. Health care delivery is primarily within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. While some provinces have taken important steps to improve the exchange of health information within their own systems, these efforts remain uneven across the country. For example, jurisdictions such as Ontario have developed electronic health record systems that allow providers to access patient information more easily, and others have implemented tools that improve access to data within the province. However, these approaches are largely confined to their respective jurisdictions and do not establish a consistent or enforceable framework across the country. Canada continues to rely upon a patchwork of systems and approaches, and Bill S-5 represents an attempt to move toward a more coherent and consistent national framework.

Whether within a province or across jurisdictions, the underlying challenge remains the same: ensuring systems can communicate effectively so that information is available when and where it is needed.

Bill S-5 attempts to respect jurisdictions by operating as a conditional framework, allowing federal requirements to apply where provinces or territories do not have measures that are substantially similar or stronger, while leaving space for jurisdictions that do. That approach may provide flexibility, but it also raises questions that the committee may wish to examine, particularly around how the concept of "substantially similar" will be defined and applied in practice and how it may be perceived by provinces and territories.

In that sense, Bill S-5 establishes an enabling framework — the strength and effectiveness of which will ultimately depend upon how it is implemented through regulation.

The bill does not, on its own, establish the full substance of that framework. Much of its effect will depend upon future regulations. Clause 8 provides broad authority to establish standards, define data-blocking practices, create compliance mechanisms and set out enforcement tools. The coming into force of the act is also left to be determined at a later date by the Governor-in-Council.

Implementation will take time. Health systems across the country operate with different infrastructures and capacities. It will take time for regulations to be developed and then implemented. For example, Bill S-5 places the focus on the role of vendors and seeks to address interoperability through requirements imposed upon systems, including prohibiting data blocking. It will be useful to better understand how those provisions would operate in practice, particularly in a complex and evolving technological environment.

This raises practical questions about how these requirements will be applied and enforced. Vendors operate across multiple jurisdictions and systems, often within existing contracts and infrastructures. The committee may wish to examine how clearly expectations will be defined and how this approach toward vendors brings Canada closer to its objective of interoperability.

Stakeholders who support the objective of interoperability have also emphasized the importance of getting the implementation right. Organizations such as the Canadian Medical Association and physician groups such as the College of Family Physicians of Canada have long called for progress in this area.

Finally, colleagues, this is the challenge with a bill like Bill S-5: When so much depends upon strong and timely regulations, our work to evaluate the bill is limited. At the end of the day, when we adopt legislation of this nature, we are not only approving its objective; we are also granting authority to the executive to give it practical effect. In doing so, Parliament sets the framework while delegating authority to the executive to determine many of the operational details through regulation.

While Parliament sets and approves the framework in the bill, Bill S-5 also gives the Governor-in-Council authority under clause 8 to amend, among many things, clause 2 definitions and to determine many of the operational details through regulation. For whatever we agree upon for a definition in clause 2, it can just as easily be amended by the executive without coming back to Parliament.

That raises an important question for us as legislators: What level of detail should properly be set by Parliament, and what can appropriately be left to regulations? For example, the bill allows for administrative monetary penalties but does not set out their amounts in the statute. One might ask whether certain core elements, such as the scale of penalties, could have been defined more clearly in the legislation, rather than being left entirely to future regulations.

While it is both necessary and appropriate for the executive to have a degree of flexibility, it is equally important that Parliament ensure that the legislative framework establishes clear parameters. Our role, therefore, is to strike the right balance: to provide sufficient authority for implementation, while maintaining appropriate guidance and oversight over how that authority is exercised and applied.

From a practical perspective, we are now in March 2026. How long before the government proposes clear and robust regulations? What technological challenges will vendors face in meeting those requirements? How much time will provinces and territories need to adapt their systems accordingly? These are practical questions that will ultimately determine whether this bill delivers on its promise.

• (2020)

Bill S-5 attempts to address a real and long-standing challenge in Canada's health system: enabling systems to better communicate so that electronic health information is available where and when it is needed and, hopefully, to reduce the patchwork across the country. That is an objective I support as long as it remains patient-centred, protecting their privacy while respecting provincial and territorial governments' primary role in health system management and service delivery.

For this bill to move from aspiration to practical change for Canadians, it will depend on the timely development of strong regulations and their effective implementation. I look forward to our committee's study of Bill S-5 so light can hopefully be shed on how the government intends to approach the regulations and what the expectations are from all parties involved. Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Kingston, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.)

BILL TO IMPLEMENT THE PROTOCOL ON THE ACCESSION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE COMPREHENSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE AGREEMENT FOR TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

SECOND READING

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Petten, seconded by the Honourable Senator Duncan, for the second reading of Bill C-13, An Act to implement the Protocol on the Accession of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, as you can see, it has been a long day and a long night, and I'm a little bit tired and a little bit discombobulated, but I don't want any of you by any means to be shocked and surprised that I might sound supportive of a government bill. So even though I am fatigued, don't chalk it up to that. You should have seen my surprise when I read a bill and they actually did something right. The confusion lingered for a little bit.

Honourable senators, I will be brief. I rise today as critic of Bill C-13, An Act to implement the Protocol on the Accession of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, to speak in support of the bill.

Honourable colleagues, the Conservatives are the party of free trade in Canada. Under Prime Minister Harper, Canada concluded free trade agreements with 52 countries, including Jordan, Colombia, South Korea, Peru and the European Free Trade Association, among many others.

I think Senator Martin and I sponsored some of these bills if I remember correctly.

We also laid the groundwork for both the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, or CETA, and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP.

Though if I remember correctly, CETA was also a brainchild of Premier Charest at the time, who was very involved with CETA — another great Conservative.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that I approach this legislation as a friendly critic. Conservatives have been calling on the government to pursue a bilateral trade agreement with the United Kingdom since Brexit. Nearly 10 years have now passed, and we remain far from a comprehensive agreement, with negotiations seemingly stalled.

In the absence of such an agreement, our trade relationship with the United Kingdom continues to be governed by the Canada-UK Trade Continuity Agreement, which essentially replicates the provisions of CETA on a transitional basis while a new bilateral agreement is negotiated.

Additionally, since the United Kingdom's request to join the CPTPP in 2021, and with the ratification process now under way, our trade relationship will also be shaped by the provisions of that agreement.

Looking at the progress in our trade relationship with the United Kingdom over the past 10 years, I am astounded that the government has not acted on this critical file more quickly. After all, the U.K. is our third-largest single-country trading partner and one of our oldest and, of course, closest allies.

Compared to other ratification legislation before us, the delay is significant. Negotiations were completed, and the accession protocol was signed in July 2023. Yet, nearly three years later, Canada remains among the last countries to ratify it.

Tardiness notwithstanding, though, Bill C-13 represents the domestic legislative process required for Canada to implement the United Kingdom's accession to the CPTPP.

Once implemented, the agreement will provide Canada with duty-free access under the CPTPP for 94% of agricultural and agri-food exports, 99% of industrial goods exports, 100% of fish and seafood exports and 100% of forest product exports, while maintaining existing quota protections for supply-managed sectors.

The bill will also expand access to U.K. markets in key service sectors, including construction, legal and veterinary services. It will extend visa durations for certain categories of workers, business visitors and investors, and secure access to procurement opportunities at all levels of government and government-regulated entities in the United Kingdom.

These provisions have been welcomed by stakeholders across sectors such as mining, pharmaceuticals and financial services.

However, colleagues, despite some gains in tariff-free export volumes for Canadian pork and beef, long-standing trade irritants in these sectors persist.

[*Translation*]

Stakeholders in Canada's meat industry have long been calling on the government to address the imbalance caused by overly restrictive export quotas. However, while there has been some progress on export quotas, the government has failed to make headway on non-tariff barriers, either in the Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement or in the United Kingdom's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP.

This imbalance cannot continue, colleagues. Once the United Kingdom's accession to the CPTPP has been ratified, the government should review the Canada-United Kingdom agreement and consider terminating it in order to restart negotiations toward a comprehensive free trade agreement that would finally resolve these issues.

[*English*]

Another group that continues to be overlooked in our trade relationship with the United Kingdom is that of British pensioners living in Canada.

Just a few weeks ago, the Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association, a delegation in which I took part along with Senator Ravalia, was in the U.K. and actually addressed that issue with a number of ministers. As many of you know, unlike British pensioners residing in the United States or the European Union, where pensions indexing agreements exist, those living in Canada do not benefit from inflation indexing. As a result, they are increasingly vulnerable in the current affordability crisis.

For years, advocacy groups have called on the government to address this inequity in negotiations with the United Kingdom. Yet, the government has remained silent, leaving approximately 127,000 British pensioners in Canada behind.

Of course, we need to do a more effective job of convincing our colleagues over in the U.K. that this is not as costly as they are pretending, but it is very unfair to Canadians with U.K. citizenship.

Finally, colleagues, I would like to put our trade relationship with the U.K. into perspective. As I have mentioned, the United Kingdom is Canada's third-largest single-country trading partner, with over $85 billion in total bilateral trade in 2025, behind only the United States and China.

In contrast, trade with the United States reached approximately $719.5 billion — nearly eight and a half times greater than our trade with the United Kingdom.

Colleagues, expanding trade with both new and long-standing democratic partners is essential. But once again, the data makes one thing clear: These agreements cannot and should not be seen as a substitute for our trade relationship with our biggest trading partner.

Whether it is a new agreement with Indonesia or expanded access through the CPTPP with the United Kingdom, these gains do not come close to the scale or importance of our deeply integrated economic relationship under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA, a relationship which has brought unprecedented wealth and economic achievement to both countries. That is where our priority must remain: ensuring a successful review of CUSMA.

Honourable senators, presidents come and go. I have said many times that the Americans will eventually come to the realization — and there are midterm elections coming — that the policy of high tariffs put into place by Donald Trump is going to be economically catastrophic for everyone, particularly the United States. At some point, common sense and reason, hopefully, will prevail so that we can continue to sustain this economic relationship for the benefit of all North Americans.

Nevertheless, colleagues, I am pleased to finally see progress on this long-delayed ratification that we are sending to committee today.

To conclude, we support the passage of Bill C-13, and I look forward to its study at committee, where we can further assess its economic impact and examine how the government can further secure critical outcomes for key sectors of our economy.

Honourable colleagues, I am in favour of moving this to committee and trying to expedite it as soon as possible. Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

• (2030)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Petten, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade.)

THE SENATE

MOTION TO RESOLVE INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE TO CONSIDER ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADOPTED

Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate), pursuant to notice of March 25, 2026, moved:

That, notwithstanding any provision of the Rules, usual practice or previous order:

1. at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, the Senate resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on the subject of artificial intelligence;

2. the Committee of the Whole receive the Honourable Evan Solomon, P.C., M.P., Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation, accompanied by at most two officials;

3. the committee rise no later than 75 minutes after it begins;

4. the minister's introductory remarks be limited to a maximum of five minutes;

5. if a senator does not use the entire period of 10 minutes for debate provided under rule 12-31(3)(d), including the responses of the witnesses, that senator may yield the balance of time to another senator;

6. if the bells are ringing for a vote at the time the committee is to meet, they be interrupted for the Committee of the Whole at that time, and resume once the committee has completed its work for the balance of any time remaining;

7. if a standing vote was deferred to a time that would occur during the meeting of the Committee of the Whole, that vote be further deferred so that the bells only begin once the committee has completed its work; and

8. for greater certainty, all witnesses appear in person.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION ADOPTED

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

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at 2 p.m.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SOIL HEALTH BILL

THIRD READING

Hon. Robert Black moved third reading of Bill S-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement, as amended.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise this evening to speak to Bill S-230, which seeks to establish a national strategy on soil health to facilitate the protection, conservation and enhancement of soil health throughout this country.

At the outset, I would like to thank Senator Mary Robinson, Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, as well as the entire committee for their active participation and insightful questions during our committee's study of Bill S-230.

I would also like to extend my sincerest thanks to each of our witnesses who took the time to share their knowledge and expertise and answer our many questions. Your contributions have provided meaningful insight into the importance of establishing a national soil health strategy and the gaps we must address for the betterment of our country and our world's soils.

Colleagues, as you know, I am a big soil advocate. After tabling AGFO's *Critical Ground* study in June 2024 with my fellow committee members, I felt inspired and was motivated to continue campaigning for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement for the betterment of our country and our world. In my mind, Bill S-230 was another step towards this goal.

Throughout our committee meetings, I was deeply inspired by the "agvocates," agronomists, farmers, agricultural organizations and stakeholders who graciously shared their observations and lived experiences with protecting soils. It's amazing to see the initiatives already under way and our country's potential for growth in these areas. The feedback and recommendations provided helped our committee strengthen Bill S-230 to ensure a fulsome, accurate, and relevant national soils strategy is developed. I can assure you that these contributions were welcomed and, indeed, warmly accepted.

As you are aware, our committee has made amendments that will reinforce the effectiveness of Bill S-230 and underscore that soil health preservation must recognize the unique experiences of farmers and Indigenous knowledge that has guided farming practices for so many years.

AGFO's critical ground report emphasized that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to sustainable soil management, and this was reinforced in the testimony we heard with respect to Bill S-230. The strategy must reflect the diversity of soils across this great country, as well as the unique experiences of farmers working within Canada's various landscapes.

I look forward to sending Bill S-230 to the other place where our parliamentary colleagues may also exercise their due diligence in ensuring that Bill S-230 is equipped with the tools it needs to establish a soil health strategy that will safeguard our agriculture and agri-food sector, environment, economy and future.

Honourable colleagues, I'm now excited to share some great news from this morning. Over the past few months, I have had the pleasure of connecting with the Honourable Heath MacDonald, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, about AGFO's soil health report, Bill S-230 and the integral role that agriculture and soil play for our country. I'm happy to share that he is supportive of this bill and the idea of developing a national soils strategy. In fact, just this morning, I had the pleasure of attending a press conference with Minister MacDonald in which he announced his government's intention to begin developing a national agricultural soil health strategy, with work beginning as early as next month, without waiting for this bill to be passed in the other place.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Black: Based on the minister's timeline, the strategy will be completed and officially launched by December 2027.

Colleagues, the announcement and the intention of the minister and his department to develop a strategy is based on Bill S-230. I am sure you can tell how excited I am to share this information with you in the chamber.

To hear that the government not only supports the bill but is ready to move forward before it is legislated is not only great news for the industry but is a great example of the importance of the Senate and this august chamber to our democratic process.

Colleagues, the government is listening, and I would like to sincerely thank Minister MacDonald for his support of this important next step in ensuring soil health protection, conservation and enhancement for the betterment of our country and our world for years to come.

As noted during the press conference this morning, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will work closely with the Soil Conservation Council of Canada, producers, provinces, territories, Indigenous agricultural groups and industry to develop this strategy in accordance with many of the objectives set out in Bill S-230.

• (2040)

This is incredible news for the protection of Canada's soils, for the agriculture and agri-food industry and for all Canadians. However, you may be wondering what this means for Bill S-230. I am happy to report that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's strategy goes hand in hand with Bill S-230.

This initiative reinforces the relevance of Bill S-230 and the need for our country to focus on preserving and enhancing our soils so that we can protect our environment, strengthen our food security and food sovereignty and safeguard the future of Canadians. I am truly excited to see the government running with Bill S-230 and acting upon its recommendations before passing both chambers.

Colleagues, you might also be asking yourself why I am speaking at third reading when the government announced its intention to begin developing this national soil health strategy now.

The answer to that question is twofold.

I wanted to share the news with the chamber as well as put on the record the government's intentions to move forward. I felt it was important to share how the government is working with senators and listening to our ideas and suggestions, while also ensuring that this august chamber and our honourable colleagues have the opportunity to support the government with this initiative based on legislation from our chamber. As more people come together to recognize the importance of soil health and take meaningful steps toward its protection and sustainability, I am feeling hopeful about the future of our soils.

However, this success does not mean we can stop here. We have an opportunity to build on this momentum by continuing to raise awareness of soil degradation and advancing the many benefits of soil health across farms, cities and communities nationwide.

The Agriculture and Forestry Committee completed its soil health study in 2024. However, soil degradation did not end with the completion of that report. In fact, soil erosion remains a significant threat to soil health and soil productivity in North America, and the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils has seen increased usage of tillage in recent years after decades of decline — two alarming trends. Although knowledge of sustainable soil management has expanded in recent years, we need to ensure that policies encourage and support the adoption of these practices.

I am hopeful that the national soil health strategy will outline important actions and recommendations that can inform policy development going forward.

During the committee's study of Bill S-230, we heard an impactful quote from Mr. Phil Paxton — from Alberta — from the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association, and I would like to share. He said, "All life depends on soil, and there is no life without soil, and there is no soil without life."

Every person has a role to play in protecting, conserving and enhancing our soils, and every person depends on the health of our soils, whether we are aware of it or not.

To remind each of you of the statistic we heard during our soil health study, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations found that in 2015, 33% of our soils from around the world were degraded to the point where they cannot be used to grow anything, with an estimate that this number could grow as high as 90% by 2050. That's 24 years away.

Honourable colleagues, I hope you can join me in recognizing and celebrating the essential role of the soil beneath our feet, and I hope you will support me in sending Bill S-230 to the other place so that we can stand in solidarity with agronomists, soil scientists, producers, farmers, ranchers and advocates who have raised their concerns about our soils and so that we may demonstrate our support for protecting, conserving and enhancing soil health across the country.

Your Honour, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous support to pass this bill at third reading, following a couple of additional speakers right now. Therefore, when the time comes today, I plan to call the question.

Thank you, colleagues, for your support, enthusiasm and positive vote to pass this bill very shortly so that it can be sent to the other place.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mary Robinson: Honourable senators, I rise today to express my support for Bill S-230, the "National Strategy for Soil Health Act."

[*English*]

Farmers, growers and ranchers across Canada, including those in my home province of Prince Edward Island, highly value their soil. By actively managing soil as a high-performing asset, soil and its productivity in turn continue to fuel our provincial economic engine.

Canadian farmers are managing more than a staggering $1 trillion worth of capital, including $700 billion in land value. That land value is driven by soil; soil's ability to deliver food, fuel and fibre; and the tight supply of available land. As they say, they aren't making any more farmland. Affectionately known as the million-acre farm, Prince Edward Island is 1.4 million acres, and 36% of the land is dedicated to farming. That's more than half a million acres of agricultural land.

Our Island's pastoral landscape is defined by its signature red sandy loam soil and perfectly manicured farm fields. Despite the impressive scale of these farm operations, they are managed by a remarkably small workforce of fewer than 4,000 people — a workforce that, in 2024, generated over $820 million in farm cash receipts and was responsible for 40% of the province's total exports.

Unique to all of Canada, Prince Edward Island has a dedicated Agricultural Crop Rotation Act designed to reduce erosion, improve groundwater and soil quality and preserve soil productivity. There are many examples of approved crop rotation management plans. Each one is custom designed to not only comply with the legislation but also to achieve environmental, soil and cropping goals, and each plan must carefully consider the unpredictability brought by ever-increasing and intense weather events.

While Senator Lewis, in his second reading speech, highlighted how no-till grain farming is a game changer for Saskatchewan's soil and carbon opportunities, the reality is different for Prince Edward Island.

Potatoes cannot be grown in a no-till fashion. Unlike a grain seed planted with no till, the potatoes that Prince Edward Island is so famous for grow best in rows of loamy soil that are hilled. In short, what works for one region of the country may not work in another. More specifically, what works on one farm might have to be different on a neighbouring farm — all of this to reinforce that one size does not fit all.

Between nuances of crop varieties, soil types and microclimates, there is a patchwork of management plans happening across our country. This speaks to the reality that the needs of soil in one part of the country can vastly differ from another. Yet Canada is still missing an aerial view.

Bill S-230 helps bring this needed perspective. It is a collaborative approach that involves a multitude of voices coming together to engage on a strategy intended to advance legislative harmony, soil literacy, data collection, information sharing and, quite importantly, the appointment of a national advocate for soil health.

In clause 2, there is a focus on knowledge improvement measures: The national soil health strategy must include measures to facilitate the gathering of data and the monitoring of indicators on soil health, including carbon content and sequestration potential, the establishment of water-stable soil aggregation and available water holding capacity. These scientific metrics are vital indicators of the state and health of a significant nationally strategic asset.

To capture this data, today's producers have moved far beyond that romanticized, old-faithful open cab tractor of decades ago. Today, the interior of a tractor cab looks more like a state-of-the-art fighter jet and comes with the price tag.

Modern farmers operate as high-level data managers, analyzing complex streams of daily information to optimize every acre and every input in order to meet a multitude of demands. As impressive as farming has always been on its own, it's important to recognize these modern stewards are going far beyond that. Farming today requires a level of sophistication to optimize these high-value assets.

A prime example of this evolution is the up-and-coming P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture's precision ag data platform AgIntel. By using infield sensors and cloud technology, AgIntel automates data collection from farm fields. It provides farmers with insights into water use, fertilizer use and carbon sequestration without requiring a 5G internet connection. This is exactly the kind of on-the-ground innovation that Bill S-230 seeks to spotlight in national conversations.

• (2050)

Senators, we talk about "one Canadian economy," about nation-building projects and about "building Canada strong."

But if we are truly serious about the strength of this nation, we must talk about our most fundamental national asset: the soil beneath our feet. Soil is a strategic national asset, and its health, enhancement, conservation and protection must be paramount in national policy discussions. Farmers need an effective regulatory framework to ensure they have the support to understand, manage and build soil health. I believe this strategy can help get us there.

Before concluding, I would like to applaud Senator Black for his tireless efforts in championing this cause — as one might say, getting his hands dirty — for years. The government's announcement this morning is a well-deserved victory. Congratulations to Senator Black and to all of Canadian agriculture on the launch of a National Agricultural Soil Health Strategy. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Black: Would the senator take a question?

Senator Robinson: Sure.

Senator Black: Thank you. I have a poor memory, so can you remind me what you carried through the Senate Chamber when you were sworn in a year or so ago, please?

Senator Robinson: Two years and a few days ago, as Senator Black was my sponsor and walked down the aisle with me, I did carry a small vial of soil from my family farm.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Honourable senators, I rise today as the friendly critic of Bill S-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement.

At its core, Bill S-230 is about more than soil. It's about people. Healthy soil is the foundation of our food systems, our water security and our public health. When soil is degraded, it is not an abstract environmental loss but a direct threat to the fundamental human rights to food, health and a safe and sustainable environment.

This bill recognizes that stewardship of the land is inseparable from human dignity. It aligns with our obligations to protect the most vulnerable: those who are already disproportionately affected by climate change, food insecurity and environmental degradation.

I want to take this opportunity to once again thank Senator Black for introducing this bill. By supporting Bill S-230, we recognize that human rights do not exist in isolation from the natural systems that sustain us. We understand that protecting soil today is also an investment in the health, security and dignity of generations to come. We affirm that every person in Canada deserves to live in a society where the land beneath our feet is protected and where that protection upholds the rights and well-being of all.

Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Question.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill, as amended, read third time and passed.)

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SIXTH REPORT OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE—DEBATE ADJOURNED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the sixth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (*Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, with amendments*), presented in the Senate on March 24, 2026.

Hon. David M. Arnot moved the adoption of the report.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise as Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to move the adoption of the report on Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

At the outset, I would first like to extend my sincere thanks to Senator Kim Pate for her tireless and principled work in bringing this legislation forward. Senator Pate has long been a thoughtful, persistent advocate for human rights, dignity and the well-being of those who are in our correctional system.

This bill, in many ways, is the culmination of years of work to address deeply troubling realities within federal corrections, particularly the use of isolation-like conditions, the treatment of individuals with mental health needs and the lack of meaningful oversight and remedies.

In that context, we cannot proceed without acknowledging the lived experience that helped these issues come to the forefront.

I wish to recognize Tona Mills, a survivor of more than 10 years in solitary confinement and of the lifelong adverse health consequences of isolation. Her story was a catalyst for Senator Pate's work, and, in turn, it helped illuminate the very human consequences of gaps in our current system.

I also wish to express condolences to Ms. Mills' family and her friends on her recent passing. Her story is a reminder that these are not abstract policy questions; they are matters of human dignity, health and life.

Honourable senators, the committee undertook a thorough and serious study of this bill over the course of eight meetings, including clause-by-clause consideration, approximately 12.5 hours of testimony, 34 witnesses and 18 written briefs. We heard a wide range of perspectives from legal experts, Indigenous leaders, community organizations, clinicians and advocates. The study began on November 5, 2025, and concluded with clause-by-clause consideration on March 12, 2026.

The central purpose of Bill S-205 is to strengthen the safeguards in our correctional system, particularly in relation to isolation-like conditions, mental health and accountability.

In the old language, we used to call this "solitary confinement." It morphed into a term known as "special handling units," the SHU, and then "structured intervention units." The common denominators were isolation and segregation.

Witnesses consistently underscored that despite prior reforms, serious concerns remain. Many described structured intervention units as continuing in practice to replicate aspects of segregation. Others emphasized the profound and well-documented harms associated with isolation, especially for individuals with mental health challenges and for those already overrepresented in the system, including Indigenous and Black Canadians, women and persons with disabilities.

We also heard strong and compelling evidence about the importance of community-based, culturally grounded supports, particularly those led by Indigenous communities, as a pathway to both healing and public safety.

At the same time, witnesses raised practical and legal concerns. These included questions about the implementation capacity, access to timely assessments and care, the feasibility of court oversight within strict timelines and the risk that well-intentioned provisions might not function as intended in practice.

It is in that context that the committee considered amendments, and I would like to place on the record a summary of those amendments.

Section 29 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act currently authorizes the transfer of an inmate from a penitentiary to a hospital, including a mental health facility, under certain conditions. Three different provisions under Bill S-205 would have amended the act to provide and specify instances in which inmates must be transferred to a hospital, including a mental health facility.

In turn, those provisions were either amended or voted down. Specifically, clause 3 would have added a requirement to transfer an inmate to a hospital for a mental assessment if a qualified medical professional could not provide an assessment in the penitentiary within 30 days of an inmate arriving at the penitentiary. Clause 6(2) would have added the same requirement for the transfer of inmates held in structured intervention units where a mental health assessment is not available within 24 hours. These time frames for mental health assessments are currently included in the act, but Bill S-205 would have added a mandatory transfer to a mental health facility if these assessments were not delivered in the penitentiary within certain required time frames.

• (2100)

Clause 4 would have added the requirement that an inmate be transferred to a hospital, including a mental health facility, if a registered health care professional concluded that the inmate has a disabling mental health issue following an assessment.

These three provisions — clause 3, subclause 6(2) and clause 4 — were either amended or voted down to remove the requirement for a mandatory transfer of an inmate to a hospital, including a mental health facility. In my opinion, this reflects a careful and focused effort by committee members to improve the bill while maintaining its core intent.

On the one hand, the testimony we heard strongly supported the principle that individuals with serious mental health needs must receive appropriate care and that prolonged or inappropriate placement in isolation-like conditions can be harmful and, in some cases, contrary to fundamental human rights.

On the other hand, witnesses and briefs raised legitimate concerns about the operational realities of mandatory transfers, particularly the availability of hospital beds, jurisdictional complexities with provincial health systems and the risk that rigid statutory requirements could create unintended consequences or delays.

The amendments adopted by the committee respond to those concerns by refining the bill's approach, ensuring that the objective of improved care remains while avoiding provisions that might not be workable in practice.

In reviewing the testimony across the meetings and by way of an explanatory background, a few themes emerge.

First, there is broad alignment on the need to reduce and strictly limit isolation-like conditions and to ensure that such placements are subject to meaningful oversight.

Second, there is strong support for improving access to mental health care and for recognizing the complex and often intersecting needs of incarcerated individuals.

Third, there is consistent emphasis on the importance of community-based supports, particularly those that are culturally grounded and led by Indigenous communities.

At the same time, there is not complete alignment on how best to achieve those goals. Some witnesses supported strong mandatory provisions to ensure access to care. Others cautioned that without sufficient capacity and coordination, such provisions could be difficult to implement and might not achieve their intended effect.

Similarly, while many supported expanding access to community-based supports for disadvantaged or minority populations, others expressed concern that such expansion must not dilute or undermine existing Indigenous-specific frameworks or create competition for limited resources. These are not contradictions so much as reflections of the complexity of the issues that were before the committee.

The written briefs submitted to the committee reinforced many of these elements. They highlighted the importance of grounding any reforms in human rights, dignity and evidence-based practice; emphasized the need for transparency and accountability, including through data and oversight; and underscored the importance of ensuring that supports are not rationed in ways that force marginalized groups to compete for access.

At the same time, the briefs reflected a diversity of views on how best to structure the bill's provisions, particularly in relation to the mental health transfers and the scope of community-based supports.

Honourable senators, the amendments adopted by the committee strike a reasonable and thoughtful balance. They respond to the evidence that we heard, improve the clarity and workability of the act and preserve its core objectives, which are to strengthen protections, improve care and enhance accountability within our correctional system.

Before concluding, I would like to thank the many individuals who supported the work of the committee from the assigned committee staff: the law clerk André Clair; the analysts, Michaela Keenan-Pelletier and Dana Phillips; the administrative assistant, Natassia Ephrem; and the clerk, Vincent Labrosse.

I also wish to acknowledge the honourable senators who served on the committee and their hard work as they put together this bill to get it to the report stage: Senator Batters, the deputy chair; and committee members Senator Clement, Senator Dhillon, Senator Miville-Dechêne, Senator Oudar, Senator Pate, Senator Prosper, Senator Saint-Germain, Senator Simons, Senator Tannas and Senator D. M. Wells. Their professionalism, expertise and dedication were essential to the thorough and thoughtful study of the bill.

Honourable senators, Bill S-205 engages fundamental questions about how we treat those in custody in this country. It asks us to consider how we ensure safety, not only for the public but also those who are within these institutions. It asks us to consider how we uphold human dignity, even in the most challenging circumstances, and to ensure that our systems are not only lawful but just, effective and humane.

The bill, as amended, reflects careful consideration of these questions. It represents a meaningful step forward that is grounded in evidence, informed by lived experience and improved through the careful work of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

For these reasons, I present and commend this report to you. I ask that you adopt the sixth report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on Bill S-205. Thank you.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

PROTECTING YOUNG PERSONS FROM EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY BILL

FIFTH REPORT OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (*Bill S-209, An Act to restrict young persons' online access to pornographic material, with amendments and observations*), presented in the Senate on March 24, 2026.

Hon. David M. Arnot moved the adoption of the report.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today in my capacity as Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to move the adoption of the fifth report on Bill S-209, An Act to restrict young persons' online access to pornographic material, as amended by the committee.

At the outset, I would like to thank Senator Miville-Dechêne for her tireless and thoughtful work in bringing this important legislation before the Senate. Her work has consistently drawn attention to the realities faced by young people in an increasingly digital environment in which access to explicit material is both widespread and, in many cases, unregulated.

As Senator Miville-Dechêne noted at second reading, the online world has evolved rapidly, while protections available to young persons have not kept pace. This bill seeks to respond to that gap to ensure that what is restricted offline is meaningfully addressed online, while recognizing the complexity of doing so in a digital and global context.

Honourable senators, the committee undertook a thorough and careful study of Bill S-209. Over the course of 10 meetings, 2 of which were dedicated to clause-by-clause consideration, we heard from 31 witnesses and received 35 written briefs. In total, the committee spent 16 hours examining the bill.

The bill began examination on October 1, 2025, and concluded with clause-by-clause consideration on March 11, 2026. During that process, 11 amendments were proposed. Seven amendments were adopted, affecting six clauses in the act. One subamendment was proposed and not adopted. Amendments were proposed by Senator Miville-Dechêne, Senator Simons and Senator Saint-Germain, as well as one by me.

• (2110)

This reflects a robust and collaborative effort to carefully consider both the objectives of the bill and the practical implications of its provisions.

Honourable senators, at its core, Bill S-209 seeks to establish a framework to limit young persons' access to pornographic material online, primarily through age-verification or age-estimation mechanisms, supported by enforcement tools and regulatory authority.

The committee heard broad agreement on one central point: Protecting young persons from harmful exposure online is an important and a legitimate objective.

At the same time, the testimony revealed a diversity of views on how best to achieve that objective.

Some witnesses emphasized the urgency of implementing effective safeguards, noting the potential harms associated with early and repeated exposure to explicit materials.

Others raised concerns about the effectiveness and feasibility of the proposed measures, particularly with respect to age verification technologies, their accuracy and their ability to operate effectively in a global digital environment.

We also heard important perspectives regarding privacy and Charter considerations. Several witnesses cautioned that certain approaches could raise concerns related to freedom of expression and privacy, particularly if they were overly broad or insufficiently targeted.

Technical experts further noted that access control measures, including blocking and filtering, have limitations, including the potential for circumvention and the risk of unintended impacts on lawful content. At the same time, many witnesses emphasized that education, digital literacy, parental support and mental health resources are critical components of any legislative approach.

In short, the evidence before the committee reflected both a shared concern for the protection of young persons and a recognition that this is a complex issue, requiring a balanced and carefully calibrated response.

The written briefs submitted to the committee reinforced many of those themes. They reflected a wide range of perspectives from legal scholars, advocacy organizations, industry representatives and experts in privacy, health and technology.

Many briefs supported the objective of the bill, while also recommending refinements to ensure that its scope is clear, its mechanisms are workable and its impacts are proportionate. Others emphasized the importance of ensuring that the regulatory approach is accompanied by broader supports, including education and prevention, and that privacy protections are robust and meaningful. Taken together, the testimony and briefs provided the committee with a strong evidentiary foundation to form its consideration of these amendments.

Honourable senators, I would now like to place on the record the summary of the amendments adopted by the committee. First of all, clause 2, the definition of pornographic material. The definition of pornographic material in clause 2 of the bill was amended by the committee. The amended definition is narrower than the original, in that it does not include depictions of female breasts and requires the depiction of explicit sexual activity. In addition, under the amended definition, pornographic material must be intended to cause sexual excitement rather than being for a sexual purpose.

Originally, clause 13 sent out a coordinating amendment with Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and make consequential amendments to other Acts. The coming into force of Bill C-291 in October 2025 and the amendment to the definition clause rendered this clause moot, and, therefore, it was defeated at committee.

Clarification of scope, clause 6. Originally, clause 6 clarified that the offence set out in the bill would not apply to an organization that incidentally, or not deliberately, provides a service that is used to search for, transmit, download, store or access pornographic material online. This clause was amended to remove the words "and not deliberately." This amendment broadens the range of excluded organizations, ensuring, in particular, that intermediaries such as search engines are not captured. It thereby narrows the scope of the bill.

Website blocking, clause 10. Clause 10 establishes an enforcement process through which the Federal Court can order internet service providers to block minors' access to pornographic material in Canada when certain conditions are met.

In the original version of the bill, clause 10(5) stated that the court order could have the effect of also preventing access to material other than pornographic material or preventing access even if the person seeking to access the material is an adult. The committee amended clause 10 to remove this subparagraph entirely, in other words, tightening up the bill.

Regulation-making powers under clause 12. Clause 12 enables the Governor-in-Council, the cabinet, to make regulations for carrying out purposes and provisions of this act. Clause 12(1)(a) specifically enables the Governor-in-Council to adjust the scope of the bill by regulation. In its original formulation, this provision allowed for regulations specifying the circumstances in which pornographic material is, or is not, to be regarded as being made available for commercial purposes, including circumstances in which pornographic material made available free of charge is, or is not, to be regarded as made available for commercial purposes.

Following amendment at committee, this provision allows for regulations specifying the circumstances in which pornographic material made available free of charge is not to be regarded as made available for commercial purposes. This amendment to the clause curtails the regulation-making power somewhat; cabinet can only scope out, and not scope in, organizations, and only in cases where pornographic material is made available free of charge.

Administrative monetary penalties, clauses 9 and 12, were amended. Clause 12(1)(a) and 12(1)(b) list specific regulation-making powers. The committee added a new clause 12(1)(c), which explicitly allows the Governor-in-Council, cabinet, to establish, by regulation, a system of administrative monetary penalties to enforce the obligations of an organization under the act. A consequential amendment was made to clause 9 to ensure that organizations are properly notified regarding the administrative monetary penalty system.

Age verification and age estimation measures, clause 12(2). This clause requires that the Governor-in-Council ensure that a prescribed age verification or age estimation method meets certain criteria set out in subparagraphs 12(2)(a) through to 12(2)(d). Originally, clause 12(2)(d) required that the method collect and use personal information solely for age-verification or age-estimation purposes, except to the extent required by law. The committee amended this subparagraph to remove the limitation "except to the extent required by law," thereby strengthening the criterion.

Clause 14 in Bill S-209 was initially set to come into force one year after Royal Assent. This clause was amended so that the bill comes into force on a day to be fixed by order of the Governor-in-Council.

Honourable senators, these amendments reflect the committee's effort to refine the bill in light of the evidence that we heard. They narrow the scope of the key definitions. They clarify the application of the bill to ensure that intermediaries are not inadvertently captured. They strengthen the safeguards, particularly in relation to privacy and potential impact on lawful access. They also provide greater precision with respect to the regulatory authority and enforcement mechanisms, ensuring that the bill is both workable and proportionate.

• (2120)

Importantly, these amendments do not alter the core objective of the bill. Rather, they seek to ensure that the means chosen to achieve the objective are clear, balanced and capable of effective implementation.

Before concluding, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee and all those who contributed to the study.

I would also like to thank the assigned committee staff for their exceptional work: the law clerk, André Claire; the analysts, Michaela Keenan-Pelletier and Dana Phillips; the administrative assistant, Natassia Ephrem; and the clerk, Vincent Labrosse.

I wish to also acknowledge the honourable senators who serve on the committee and the hard work they put into this act to get this bill to its report stage — Deputy Chair Senator Batters and committee members, Senator Clement, Senator Dhillon, Senator Miville-Dechêne, Senator Oudar, Senator Pate, Senator Prosper, Senator Saint-Germain, Senator Simons, Senator Tannas and Senator K. Wells. Their expertise, diligence and professionalism were essential to the committee's work.

Honourable senators, Bill S-209 addresses a challenging and evolving issue. It seeks to protect young persons in a digital environment that is complex, rapidly changing and often difficult to regulate. The committee's work has sought to ensure that this legislation reflects not only the importance of that objective but also the need for clarity, balance and respect for broader legal principles.

In that spirit, I ask you to adopt the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on Bill S-209.

Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

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

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

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Dasko, seconded by the Honourable Senator Forest, for the second reading of Bill S-213, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (demographic information).

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): I move the adjournment of the debate for the remainder of my time.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)

SPECIAL ECONOMIC MEASURES ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Dasko, seconded by the Honourable Senator Simons, for the second reading of Bill S-214, An Act to amend the Special Economic Measures Act (disposal of foreign state assets).

Hon. David M. Wells: Honourable senators, I rise today as critic of Bill S-214, An Act to amend the Special Economic Measures Act (disposal of foreign state assets), which seeks to allow the Canadian government to seize and dispose of foreign state assets and redirect their value, potentially toward reconstruction or compensation efforts.

The triggers for the Special Economic Measures Act are a grave breach of international peace and security; gross, systematic human rights violations; or a call by an international organization, for example, for a sanctions regime.

Colleagues, let me begin by thanking Senator Dasko for taking up this legislation and for her thoughtful remarks in introducing it. As she noted, this bill was originally brought forward by former Senator Omidvar in the previous Parliament, largely in response to Russia's illegal and brutal invasion of Ukraine. That context matters, and it continues to shape how we consider this bill today.

At that time, as colleagues will recall, our caucus expressed support for the principle behind this legislation. Senator Housakos, in his remarks at second reading of Bill S-278 — the previous bill — made clear that holding aggressor states accountable, including through financial means, is an objective we share. That remains the case today. We support this goal.

However, support for the objective does not relieve us of our responsibility to scrutinize the mechanism. When we look more closely at this bill, we are left with an uncomfortable truth: This is, in many respects, a largely symbolic exercise. It is a measure that may make us feel as though we are taking meaningful action, but in practical terms, it is unlikely to have any measurable impact on Russia or its war in Ukraine.

Even former Senator Omidvar acknowledged this reality in the previous Parliament that there are, actually, very limited Russian state assets in Canada to seize. Senator Dasko herself confirmed in her remarks that we do not even have a clear picture of what assets remain here today.

We are debating a tool that — while rhetorically powerful — may have little real-world application. That raises a broader concern.

Colleagues, when a country lacks hard power, when it is not at the table where decisive geopolitical outcomes are shaped, there can be a tendency to elevate symbolic or soft-power tools beyond any actual real effect. We invest them with meaning that exceeds their practical reach. We convince ourselves that we are shaping outcomes, when, in reality, we are reacting to them.

We have seen this clearly in recent years. When major powers convened to determine the course of events, whether in Washington or elsewhere, Canada was not among those shaping the outcome. That is a sobering reality and one that should inform how we evaluate legislation like this.

Colleagues, there is another dimension to this debate that deserves attention. In speaking to the predecessor bill, both former Senator Omidvar and Senator Kutcher drew parallels between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other acts of violence on the global stage.

I'll quote Senator Kutcher:

> More recently, we have watched in horror as a terrorist organization slaughtered hundreds of innocent civilians and then used its own people as human shields against retaliation. History has often noted that evil, when left unaddressed, ends in tragedy. We have a responsibility to do our part to respond vigorously and to do our best to avert the tragic consequences of inaction.

Former Senator Omidvar, at second reading, described Russia's invasion in stark terms as an unprovoked attack involving the targeting of civilians and the taking of children.

These were powerful statements, and rightly so. They also raise a difficult and unavoidable question: If this legislative tool is to be used, and if it is as broadly applicable as its proponents suggest, then how will it be applied across different conflicts and different circumstances?

It is a question if Hamas is a state actor. This bill may not apply to them. Hezbollah is not a state actor. Many nations have proxies and actions that may be covered under this legislation, and they may not clearly draw a line to that state.

So, if not non-state actors, then which states would fall within this scope and on what consistent basis? Colleagues will recall that this chamber has previously considered legislation related to sanctions on state sponsors of terrorism, including Iran, and those debates raised differing views on approach and application.

Further, colleagues, what if an aggressor state is an ally of Canada? What if their ties to Canada are geographical, cultural, economic and include partnerships that are military and defensive in nature? Then what? Do we ignore potential significant unintended consequences?

It raises a legitimate concern that tools like this may not always be applied consistently but could, instead, reflect evolving interpretations of international events and priorities, which brings me to what is another serious issue with this bill.

This legislation proposes to grant significant new powers to the executive, specifically, the power to seize sovereign state assets without meaningful parliamentary oversight — not through the courts, not through Parliament, but through executive action.

Colleagues, we should pause here.

• (2130)

The State Immunity Act is clear. A foreign state is immune from the jurisdiction of Canadian courts. This bill does not resolve or address that conflict. It attempts to avoid it by removing the courts from the process altogether.

We are members of an institution that exists, in part, to provide deliberative thought and to act as a check on executive power. Yet, here we are, being asked to consider legislation that expands that power and does so in a way that reduces traditional avenues of independent oversight.

We do not need to look far to see how expansive executive authority can be used and misused. We have seen it elsewhere, but we've seen elements of it in our own history. During the October Crisis, hundreds were detained without charge, many of whom were never connected to any crime.

Safeguards exist for a reason. We saw it with the application of the Emergencies Act, which the Federal Court later decreed illegal. We should be cautious before weakening the safeguards.

There is also a practical problem at the heart of this bill. It assumes that costs associated with seizure and disposal can be recovered from a foreign state. In practice, Canadian courts cannot enforce such claims against a foreign state. That leaves a gap between what the bill proposes and what can realistically be implemented.

Finally, colleagues, I want to return to a point that's often made in this chamber and made forcefully during debates on sanctions legislation.

Sanctions, when pursued unilaterally, do not work well. We have heard this from colleagues across the aisle, including Senators Woo, Harder and others, in the context of sanctions regimes, including those related to Iran. The argument has been consistent. Sanctions are only effective when applied multilaterally, in coordination with allies.

This bill contemplates a framework that Canada could deploy independently. If we already accept that unilateral sanctions are ineffective, then what are we truly achieving here?

Colleagues, this bill is well intentioned. It is grounded in a desire to hold aggressors accountable and to stand with victims of war and oppression. These are values we all share. Good intentions are not enough because, at the core of the bill, two fundamental questions remain unanswered.

First, conceptually, how exactly is this supposed to work? We are told this creates a legal pathway to seize sovereign state assets through executive action. What does that look like in practice? What kinds of assets? How are they identified, valued, seized and transferred? What legal challenges will arise under international or Canadian law? What are the implications for Canada's reputation as a stable and predictable jurisdiction?

These are not minor implementation details. They go to the heart of whether this proposal is viable at all.

Second, and more importantly, what precedent are we setting? Even the original sponsor acknowledged that this bill is, in part, establishing a precedent. Colleagues, we should be very careful about the precedents we choose to establish.

In fact, colleagues, consider this: If we establish a precedent with, for instance, Russian state assets that sit on Canadian soil, and we seize them, sell them and distribute the funds to reconstruction in Ukraine, what happens when another country does it? The precedent has been set. Are we bound to continue that?

Canada is a country of laws, and precedent is one of the bases of those laws. If Canada asserts the right to seize the sovereign assets of another state through this executive order, are we not operating in a vacuum? Other countries may adopt the same approach, not all of them applying it with the same restraint.

Are we comfortable with Canadian state assets abroad being subject to similar treatment, potentially by regimes that do not share our values, our legal traditions or our respect for the rule of law? Once that door has been opened, colleagues, it does not close easily.

This is not just about Russia, and it is not just about Ukraine. It is about the long-term integrity of international legal norms, the role of Parliament and the limits we place on executive power. For those reasons, while I support the objective, I remain concerned about the mechanism. I look forward to a deeper dive into these issues during further study at committee.

Thank you, colleagues.

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I made some quick edits so that I do not sound repetitive in relation to the speech that we've just heard, and also so that we can try to leave at a reasonable hour.

I rise as well to speak to Bill S-214, An Act to amend the Special Economic Measures Act. Thank you to Senator Wells of Newfoundland and Labrador for your thoughtful remarks. I have a deep sense of gratitude to Senator Dasko for reintroducing this important bill, which, as many of you will recall, was previously brought forward by Senator Omidvar in 2023 during the Forty-fourth Parliament.

Although I am not our party's critic on this legislation, as I was on its previous iteration, Bill S-278, I wish to speak to it once again and to reiterate my unequivocal support for this bill.

It is long past time for Canada to take a tougher and more principled stance in confronting Vladimir Putin's autocratic network. This bill represents not only a necessary step in that fight but also a concrete move toward securing meaningful monetary redress for Ukraine's reconstruction.

At its core, Bill S-214 would introduce a legal tool enabling the Government of Canada to seize and repurpose the assets of foreign states that act in contravention of international peace and security. It would allow the proceeds and, in some cases, the assets themselves, to be used for the benefit of those whose lives have been devastated by such actions.

In the context of Russia's illegal and unprovoked war against Ukraine, this would mean the confiscation of Russian state assets held in Canada and their repurposing to support Ukraine's reconstruction, the cost of which the World Bank estimates will exceed $600 billion.

Unfortunately, we do not know with certainty the current value of Russian state assets remaining in Canada. Prior to the 2022 invasion, that value was estimated at approximately $16 billion. What we do know is that roughly $22 billion in Canadian-denominated bonds, held by the Russian state and past their maturity, remain frozen in Euroclear accounts in Brussels. Regardless of the precise amount, colleagues, it is imperative that Canada take this legislative step if only to demonstrate to our democratic allies that we are prepared to act, and that a legal pathway exists to confiscate Russian state assets for Ukraine's reconstruction.

Equally important is the message this sends to the Kremlin — that its transgressions are neither cost-free nor forgotten, and that the world's democracies stand strong with Ukraine.

There are compelling arguments under international law that states have a duty to cooperate through lawful means to bring an end to serious breaches of international law. This obligation is set out in Article 41 of the articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, adopted by the UN General Assembly.

I remind colleagues that Russia was found, in March 2022, to be in breach of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

Colleagues, the importance of Bill S-214 extends well beyond its monetary implications. It speaks to whether Canada is prepared to equip itself with the tools necessary to push back against authoritarian or totalitarian aggression and to defend democratic values. We are living in a moment when democracy is under sustained pressure across the globe. Regrettably, it is also a time when our own government appears increasingly willing to subordinate long-standing humanitarian and democratic principles in the pursuit of expediency.

As Beijing's belligerence toward Taiwan escalates to increasingly dangerous levels, it is essential that this chamber positions itself firmly on the side of democracy. We must send a clear message to the Chinese Communist Party that Canada believes in the rule of law, in a rules-based international order, and that we are prepared to use every legitimate tool at our disposal to defend it should Beijing decide to attack Taiwan.

Bill S-214 helps us do precisely that. It would also strengthen our ability to confront the brutality of the Iranian regime, particularly as the government continues to struggle with an effective response to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, and its malign network firmly entrenched in our country, as we've seen from media reports over the last few weeks.

It would allow us to respond more credibly to President Erdoğan's autocratic grip on Türkiye and to actions that undermine regional peace and security, such as the Turkish-backed Azerbaijani assault on Nagorno-Karabakh.

As American journalist and author Anne Applebaum writes in her 2024 book, *Autocracy, Inc.*, modern authoritarian regimes operate as sophisticated transnational networks. They collaborate to preserve power, amass wealth and evade accountability, often exploiting the very financial and regulatory systems that democratic nations have built, benefitting from short-sighted political decisions that privilege so-called strategic economic agreements over democratic values.

Bill S-214, at the very least, offers a safeguard. It provides Canada with a credible and principled legal instrument, one that is fully consistent with the values we should uphold as legislators and as a nation.

Once again, I wish to thank Senator Dasko for taking up the mantle of this effort and for her leadership on this important file. I also wish to acknowledge former Senator Omidvar for her early work in bringing this legislation forward with conviction and with principled hard work.

Colleagues, I wholeheartedly support Bill S-214. I believe it is not only in the best interests of this chamber and of our country to advance it but that it is also our moral obligation to do so. I urge you to join me in sending Bill S-214 to committee for further study, approval and passage as soon as possible.

Thank you, colleagues.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Dasko, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade.)

• (2140)

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Wallin, seconded by the Honourable Senator Quinn, for the second reading of Bill S-231, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying).

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): I will take the adjournment in my name.

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

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Some Hon. Senators: No.

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned, on division.)

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH IN CANADA BILL

SECOND READING

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Henkel, seconded by the Honourable Senator Francis, for the second reading of Bill S-243, An Act to establish a national framework for women's health in Canada.

Hon. Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia: Honourable senators, women in Canada wait longer, are diagnosed later and are too often dismissed or disbelieved when they seek care, not because we lack compassion or clinical skill but because our system was never deliberately designed with women's health at its centre.

Bill S-243, the National Framework for Women's Health in Canada Act, is our opportunity to change that.

This bill, brought forward by Senator Henkel, does something both creative and transformative. I would like to thank Senator Henkel for taking this wonderful initiative.

This bill does not create a new program. It does not intrude on provincial jurisdiction, and it does not medicalize women's lives. Instead, it asks one clear thing of the federal government: to lead the development of a coherent, national framework for women's health in collaboration with the provinces and territories, Indigenous Peoples, health professionals, researchers and community organizations. In other words, it creates coordination, not duplication, and accountability, where today there are fragmentation and silence.

For decades, women's health policy has been a patchwork of projects, pilot programs and well-intentioned announcements, without a durable plan to guide investment, data, research and service delivery across the country. The consequences are visible in every region: women in rural and remote communities travelling hours for basic care; women in equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous, racialized and 2SLGBTQI+ people, facing multiple barriers; and women without regular primary care left to cycle through emergency rooms with preventable conditions.

When half the population is navigating a system that does not consistently see or serve them, that is not a series of individual stories; that is a system failure.

Bill S-243 responds to that failure with a clear, structured approach built on four pillars: understanding, preventing, training and coordinating.

It requires the Minister of Health, within one year, to develop a national framework that strengthens research and innovation on women's health, improves primary and preventive care across all ages and life stages, enhances training for health care professionals and targets access gaps for those who face the greatest barriers.

Colleagues, it also obliges the federal government to convene at least one national conference in developing the framework, followed by recurring conferences every three years, and to regularly report to Parliament on that progress. This is not a symbolic gesture; it is a cycle of monitoring, evaluation and public accountability.

As a family physician, I have seen how the absence of such a framework plays out in exam rooms and hospital corridors: a woman with debilitating endometriosis told for years that her pain was "normal"; a newcomer juggling two jobs who skips follow-up appointments because there is no child care and no primary care provider who understands her context; a senior in a rural community whose cardiac symptoms are misinterpreted because they do not fit the "classic" male pattern taught in textbooks.

These stories are not outliers, colleagues; they are the predictable result of a system that has not invested adequately in women-specific research, training or access.

Critically, this bill also recognizes that women's health is not just a health issue; it is both an economic and social imperative. Healthier women participate more fully in the labour force, care for families and communities, and drive innovation and entrepreneurship, including in women-led health businesses.

By fostering collaboration between public systems and the private sector and by creating clearer pathways for women's health research and commercialization, the framework can support both better outcomes and a more productive, innovative Canada.

Colleagues, some may worry that this legislation will add bureaucracy or burden to already stretched providers. The sponsor and experts have been clear: The goal is not more paperwork but a smarter structure. By asking where the money is going, how it is being used, and where gaps and duplications lie, the framework can help us use existing and future investments more effectively. The risk of inaction is not the absence of process; it is the continuation of uncoordinated efforts that fail to move the dial for the women we serve.

The bill is also grounded in listening. It is informed by the work of the Women's Health Coalition and Women's Health Collective Canada, as well as many advocates, clinicians, researchers and community organizations that have pressed for a national approach.

Many women have written to us describing unbearable pain, delayed diagnoses and a profound sense of abandonment by a system that was supposed to help them. Supporting this bill is a way of saying to them, "We see you, we hear you and we are prepared to act with you."

Honourable senators, the status quo is untenable. Bill S-243 does not pretend to solve every problem in women's health, but it creates the conditions to do better — fairer, more evidence-based and more accountable care.

Colleagues, I urge you to support this legislation and to send it promptly to committee so that we can refine it where needed, hear from Canadians and move swiftly toward a national framework that finally reflects women's health as the priority it has always deserved to be.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Amina Gerba: Honourable senators, I rise today to express my support for Bill S-243, the "National Framework for Women's Health in Canada Act." I commend Senator Henkel for this initiative and for the thoroughness of her work. I also commend all the senators who have already contributed to these debates; we have just heard from our colleague, Senator Ravalia. This is a critical issue.

I do not wish to revisit the personal story I've already shared with you, or talk about my experience with the health care system, but it is one of the reasons why I agreed to speak here today.

• (2150)

Women's health cannot be relegated to the background; it lies at the heart of public health and directly reflects the quality and fairness of our system. We've made some progress, but systemic gaps persist: symptoms that go unrecognised, delayed diagnoses and inappropriate treatments. These failures are not isolated errors; they stem from a model that does not sufficiently incorporate the biological, social and cultural specificities of women.

S-243 addresses these shortcomings by proposing a coherent national framework based on four action verbs: understand, prevent, train and coordinate. The aim is clear: to move from a system that corrects after the fact to one that is proactive, takes differences into account and ensures equitable quality of care across the whole country. Let's not forget the difference between equality and equity. Equality standardizes the services offered, while equity adapts the response to actual needs. Not all women present the same symptoms, face the same risks or live in the same circumstances. Offering them the same thing does not ensure the same opportunities.

[*English*]

Our responsibility is to adjust our policies, practices and tools to ensure that the quality and the safety of care are guaranteed for every woman.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, the birthing process is still prone to serious issues. It is a medical, psychological and social experience all in one. Too often, childbirth is treated like some routine procedure, when behind every birth is a unique story. Every mother in this chamber has a birth story. Pregnancy is just one step; childbirth is another, often more difficult step, marked by diverse realities that are rarely discussed, such as birth-related complications and postpartum depression.

A national framework is therefore highly appropriate. Among other things, it will ensure that medical teams get the tools they need and that women receive support tailored to the realities they face. Adding to this already uneven playing field is another reality that is still poorly understood, a reality known as "misogynoir." It's a particular kind of discrimination that combines racism and sexism and specifically affects Black women. I doubt that more than one or two people in this House have ever heard of this phenomenon before, apart from the Black women. It's well-documented in Canada, however, having been the subject of a television report by ICI Radio-Canada. Misogynoir involves a set of stereotypes that sustain discriminatory mechanisms with tangible effects on Black women's health. Health care professionals spend less time listening to Black women and take their pain less seriously, because they think that Black women have a higher pain tolerance, if you can believe it. As a result, Black women are examined less thoroughly and their trust is eroded.

This reality takes on a whole new meaning when we think of the late Soki Syayighosola, the mother of my assistant, Magali. She was a Black immigrant woman who died in Montreal in 2008 from internal bleeding following a miscarriage. Despite test results indicating serious danger, the on-call doctor did not believe the findings and did not even come to treat her. This death, which received widespread media coverage at the time, painfully illustrates what experts describe as the medical manifestation of misogynoir, a systemic tendency to downplay the pain, symptoms and credibility of Black women, with potentially fatal consequences.

[*English*]

Naming "misogynoir" means acknowledging that a national framework for women's health must explicitly address these biases.

[*Translation*]

This systemic violence does not affect only Black women. It also affects Indigenous women, as tragically illustrated by the case of Joyce Echaquan, an Atikamekw mother who died at the Joliette hospital in 2020 after livestreaming staff using racist slurs against her. That is what our health care system is like. Her case exposed the persistence of discriminatory and dehumanizing practices that directly endanger the lives of Indigenous women.

Honourable senators, the state has a duty to guarantee a health care system that is fair, inclusive and truly responsive to women's needs. Investing in women's health should not be a series of isolated measures. It should strengthen the very foundations of our system, support families, foster social participation and promote prosperity. By acknowledging these gaps — whether they involve inequities in diagnosis, flaws in the perinatal continuum, social pressures that render distress invisible, or the specific barriers faced by Black and Indigenous women — we are affirming our commitment to taking sustainable and systemic action. This is how we will build a truly equitable health care system that meets the realities and needs of all women.

[Senator Gerba]

• (2200)

[*English*]

Bill S-243 is essential because it ensures that every woman, regardless of her background, identity or where she lives, has access to care based on science, empathy, dignity and equity.

For all these reasons, I fully support this legislative initiative. By passing Bill S-243, we can finally translate repeated observations into measurable results for women, their families and communities and ensure that best practices become the norm across our country.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, I urge you to send Bill S-243 to committee as soon as possible for an in-depth study so that we can finally have a national framework for all women. Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Jane McCallum: Honourable senators, I would like to begin by referencing Senator Henkel and the phrase she used, "Mind the gap," as a powerful way to describe the historic inequities between women's and men's health. Women's health has long been underfunded, under-researched and undervalued across systems.

While this gap exists broadly, it is significantly wider and more dangerous for First Nations women.

Understanding women's health inequities in Canada requires us to look beyond averages and examine who is being left the furthest behind. The key message here is that to truly understand the gap, we must ground ourselves in the lived realities of First Nations women and recognize that their experiences define the severity of the issue.

I want to introduce a community-based teaching here, and it is moving between a dock and a fishing boat, a familiar experience in many First Nations communities. What is required to move safely from one to the other? Careful timing, steady balance and, most importantly, support from others reaching out. When the timing is off, the risk is immediate and people can fall.

The most dangerous place is not where you start or where you are going; it is the space in between, which is where First Nations women are. That space is unstable, unpredictable and capable of causing real harm.

The key message here is that the health care gap is not a minor inconvenience; it is a place of real and present danger where harm occurs.

Let's contrast experiences of the lived reality of the gap. For many Canadians, accessing care may feel manageable, like stepping across a small gap. For First Nations women, it is a high-risk leap in unstable conditions.

What do women encounter in that gap? Racism within health care settings, trauma and re-traumatization, delays in care or a complete lack of access.

While working in nursing stations for over 40 years, I have seen all of this with nursing, physician care, dental care and mental health care. That is one of the reasons that I decided to come to the Senate.

These are not isolated incidents; these are patterns within the system. Women are not avoiding care due to neglect, lack of knowledge or lack of effort. They are making decisions based on real experiences of harm and unsafe systems. I have had many conversations with patients over the years.

The key message is that avoidance of care is not the problem; the system itself is.

When we are framing Bill S-243, we need to reaffirm that First Nations women are Canadian women and must be fully included in any national framework.

Bill S-243 is an important opportunity to address long-standing inequities. This bill should reflect the voices and needs of all women. It cannot fulfill that purpose unless it explicitly includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis women. In the bill, "Indigenous" is only mentioned twice. I saw it as an afterthought, and so did the group I met with last week, the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba, or FNHSSM.

The key message is that if a bill does not address these disparities, it cannot meaningfully claim to serve all women in Canada.

The jurisdictional gap is a core structural issue. One of the most significant drivers of inequity is the divide between federal and provincial health care systems. The key realities are that federal services in First Nations communities are chronically underfunded and that provincial systems are often geographically and structurally out of reach.

The difficulty of having both governments work together to address First Nations issues has been problematic, and it's sometimes impossible. You can look at Jordan's Principle and what we had to do, and that's still happening.

What do women navigate? They travel long distances across jurisdictions. The approval process for Non-Insured Health Benefits takes a long time. The delays directly affect care outcomes and exacerbate illness. There are language and financial problems.

The core issue is that women are forced to ask, at the point of care, who will pay.

I have heard of incidents where people have come to Winnipeg to access care, and they end up on the street with no money. It is a very scary situation.

The key message is that this is not an accidental gap; it is a system failure by design, rooted in fragmented responsibility.

Now let's look at prenatal care gaps. Prenatal care access is significantly unequal, especially in northern Manitoba and inner-city Winnipeg. Only 71% of First Nations, Métis and Inuit mothers have a regular health care provider, compared to 89% of other mothers.

Structural barriers include limited or no providers and outside providers who visit sporadically with limited community connection and who do not and cannot provide seamless care.

When we look at the deeper root causes, we look at the history of forced and coerced sterilization, ongoing child care apprehensions and experiences of racism and medical trauma. And medical assistance in dying, or MAID, has been offered by health professionals unilaterally, and I have had people call and tell me that.

I wanted to reinforce that these factors shape whether care feels safe or accessible. The key message is that the avoidance of care is an informed response to harm, not a failure of individuals.

With health outcome inequities, gaps in access translate into serious health outcomes.

Key stats include that infant mortality is three times higher for First Nations infants in Manitoba, diabetes rates are four to five times higher in First Nations women than other women, cardiovascular disease has earlier onset and more severe outcomes and cancer has a later diagnosis with higher mortality rates. And I have had family members and friends in this situation.

• (2210)

For infectious diseases, hepatitis B rates are four times higher; 47.9% of HIV cases among women are First Nations, Métis or Inuit; and the rate of syphilis is 13 times higher. These are not random or individual issues.

The key message is the following: These outcomes are the result of systemic inequities, not personal choices.

I will speak about the child welfare connection. First Nations children represent 91% of children in care in Manitoba. This connects directly to maternal health. Women navigate pregnancy with the fear of child apprehension, resulting in the avoidance of care and subsequent poorer health outcomes. Women experience four times higher mortality risk when children are apprehended and placed in Child and Family Services care.

What are the impacts? It includes increased mistrust of systems, fear of engagement with health care and emotional and psychological stress. I note:

> . . . child removal by child protective services substantially influenced the risk of preventable death in all mothers, with the highest absolute burden and rate of preventable death found in First Nations mothers. . . .

The key message is the following: The child welfare system is not separate. It deepens and reinforces the health care gap.

I will speak about the Indigenous midwifery gap. Indigenous midwifery was once central to community health and matriarchal systems. Indigenous midwifery was made illegal in the 1950s, replaced by an extractive and medical intervention model. I was the first child in my family of 13 to be sent to the hospital.

The current barriers include a lack of regulatory pathways for Indigenous midwives and minimal to no investment in Indigenous pathways for community-led birth work and midwifery education and employment.

Here are existing solutions: the Strengthening Families Maternal Child Health Program and the creation of a First Nations framework for developing Indigenous birth helpers, or doulas, and laddering education into community-based midwifery education.

An example of success of this pathway exists in northern Manitoba with the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, where four Maternal Child Health, or MCH, staff are working as birth helpers and completing midwifery apprenticeship education through the National Council of Indigenous Midwives.

The key message is the following: The knowledge and models exist. The gap is in investment and political will.

I will speak about the birth evacuation gap. Many First Nations women must leave their communities weeks before birth. The impacts are psychological and social: separation from family, language and support, as well as isolation during childbirth. Childbirth is one of the most celebrated ceremonies in First Nations, and the mother is unable to celebrate with family because she is alone in the city or town.

I will speak about the financial impacts. According to the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program data, which is not comprehensive, it does not include travel covered via contribution agreements or other transfer arrangements; travel covered by other programs and initiatives, such as the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program, Jordan's Principle, the Inuit Child First Initiative or provincial or territorial programs; or travel covered by private insurance or paid out of pocket.

At least 8,715 distinct Indigenous and First Nations clients were evacuated for childbirth between 2018-19 to 2024-25. These are First Nations and Inuit clients. It didn't include the Métis. It is not disaggregated.

For maternal health-related appointments, which include prenatal care, postnatal care and ultrasounds, this is consistently over 5,000 per year. The total for 2024-25 is 5,719, and there are 10,312 escorts.

The key message is the following: This system is harmful, costly and culturally disruptive, yet continues due to a lack of investment in community care.

I will speak about the research gap. Women's health research is underfunded overall. It highlights a deeper issue: First Nations, Inuit and Métis women are further excluded from data, there's a lack of distinctions-based approaches and there's limited First Nations-led, Métis-led and Inuit-led research.

The key message is the following: Without accurate data, inequities remain invisible and unaddressed.

I will speak about the legal and rights-based obligations. We have the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action 18, 19 and 23; the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples regarding health rights and self-determination; and sections 7 and 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These are not recommendations. They are commitments and legal obligations.

The key message is the following: Addressing these gaps is not optional; it is required.

Here is the economic gap: the high cost of evacuation, lost wages and productivity for women who are medically evacuated and long-term health system strain. Preventative community-based care is more effective and less costly.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator McCallum, your time has expired. Are you asking for more time to finish your speech?

Senator McCallum: Yes, please.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator McCallum: Thank you to everyone. I know it is a late night.

The key message is the following: Investing upstream is both fiscally responsible and socially just.

What Bill S-243 must do is clearly state required actions: recognize federal responsibility to First Nations women's health; centre First Nations, Inuit and Métis women; support Indigenous-led care models; and invest in midwifery, prenatal and early childhood support. Research needs to be Indigenous-led, distinctions-based and OCAP compliant. It must address jurisdictional and funding gaps.

In closing, it's about accountability. This is not about charity or inclusion as an afterthought. There must be calls for accountability to treaties, the Constitution, the Charter, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Jordan's Principle.

The final message is the following. If First Nations women are not healthy, Canada's women are not healthy. We cannot leave women in the gap. We must build that bridge.

Thank you.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to speak at second reading of Bill S-243, An Act to establish a national framework for women's health in Canada.

I want to begin by thanking our colleague, the Honourable Danièle Henkel, for her leadership in introducing this important bill. Senator Henkel, your dedication to women's health is both inspiring and necessary. You have used your platform to shine a light on a systemic oversight that has persisted for far too long, and for that, you have my sincere respect.

As the official critic of this bill, I have spent considerable time reflecting on its provisions. My perspective is shaped by my identity as a woman of Korean descent and as a daughter of immigrants. I watched my parents navigate a health care system that was often a "black box" — one where language barriers and cultural differences were compounded by a medical model that didn't always see them. And it's shaped by my identity as a mother of a daughter who is currently the exact age as I was when I gave birth to her and for whom I wish greater precision of health care and services as a woman who may experience childbirth, postpartum depression, menopause or other female-specific health issues in life.

When we talk about women's health, we are not talking about a niche interest or a special interest group. Women make up the majority of the population in Canada. We are 50.4% of the people in this country. We are the majority of the workforce in health care, education and the service sector. We make a majority of the health care decisions for our families. And yet, for decades, the system has treated the female body as a "variation" of the male body rather than a distinct biological reality.

• (2220)

The preamble of Bill S-243 rightly identifies that historical inequities in research have left women behind. For nearly half a century, the gold standard in clinical research was the "Reference Man," a 1975 benchmark established by the International Commission on Radiological Protection. This "standard human" was defined as a 70-kilogram, 170-centimetre-tall Caucasian male in his twenties.

This was not a harmless academic shortcut. It became the blueprint for drug dosages, car safety testing, radiation exposure limits and diagnostic criteria for everything from heart attacks to kidney disease. And because women, particularly women of colour, did not fit this 70-kilogram Caucasian male mould, they were often excluded from clinical trials.

The result? Women are 50% more likely to be misdiagnosed following a heart attack and significantly more likely to experience adverse drug reactions because those drugs were tested on men and then scaled down by weight for women, ignoring the fundamental differences in metabolism, enzyme activity and cellular response.

We see this most clearly in the realm of autoimmune disorders. Women account for nearly 80% of all autoimmune cases, across more than 100 conditions. For example, Sjögren's syndrome has a female-to-male ratio of 9 to 1. I learned that Sjögren's syndrome is a chronic autoimmune disorder characterized by immune system attacks on moisture-producing glands, leading to characteristic dry eyes and mouth. It primarily affects women, usually in their forties and fifties, causing widespread dryness, severe fatigue, joint pain and potential damage to organs like the lungs or kidneys.

Yet, because these conditions primarily affect women, they are often underfunded and under-researched, leaving women to wait an average of five years and visit four different doctors before receiving a correct diagnosis.

Then there is the issue of reproductive transitions. I think of the Complex Menopause Clinic at BC Women's Hospital, which I recently learned about when I met a group of brilliant health advocates from B.C. at Senator Henkel's informative event on the Hill, hosted in collaboration with the Women's Health Coalition of Canada. It is currently the only clinic of its kind in a province of 5 million people. As someone who navigated a decade-long journey through menopause, I can tell you this: This is not just a medical issue. It is a productivity issue, and one that affects all women.

When a woman in the prime of her career, perhaps a CEO, a senior partner or a skilled tradeswoman, leaves the workforce because her symptoms are dismissed as "stress," the entire Canadian economy suffers. This "silent tax" on women is a drain on our national prosperity. This is why the conversation Senator Henkel has started is so vital.

Honourable senators, as the critic, my goal is to ensure that Bill S-243 is examined with the highest level of diligence. I believe in the power of a national framework. Indeed, I am a proponent of such frameworks because they provide the North Star for federal-provincial cooperation.

For this framework and others to be truly effective, there needs to be a rigorous study to ensure the implementation of this bill avoids the pitfalls of bureaucracy and jurisdictional friction.

I wish to highlight three specific areas where I believe the committee's study must provide clarity to this chamber.

The first one is optimizing clinical outcomes over administrative process. Clause 2(3) of the bill mandates a national conference within one year, followed by recurring conferences every three years. While dialogue is essential, the committee must hear from health administrators on how to ensure these conferences result in tangible data sharing rather than just administrative overhead.

In a time of record-high national debt, every dollar must be a working dollar. I want the committee to explore how these conferences can be streamlined — perhaps by integrating them into existing federal-provincial-territorial, or FPT, tables — to ensure that the primary focus remains on front-line research and diagnostic tools. We must ensure the framework's legacy is measured in lives saved, not in reports filed. Referring to what Senator McCallum has said, we need to make sure that women of Indigenous, Inuit and Métis communities are at that table.

The second area is making federal leadership a catalyst for provincial excellence. Clause 2 calls for federal leadership. In our federation, health care delivery is a provincial and territorial responsibility. The most effective federal leadership is not that which dictates, but that which catalyzes.

We have incredible pockets of excellence in Canada. Ontario has specialized women's health hubs. British Columbia has world-leading Indigenous wellness programs and, as I previously stated, a one-of-kind Complex Menopause Clinic. A national framework should act as a knowledge-sharing bridge.

I hope the committee will invite provincial representatives to testify on how this federal coordination can best support their unique jurisdictions. By understanding the FPT dynamics now, we ensure the framework is welcomed by the provinces as a tool for innovation, rather than viewed as a jurisdictional encroachment. This clarity is essential for any national health strategy to succeed.

Lastly, the third area is ensuring biological and clinical precision. I want to address the importance of clinical focus. Clause 2 includes references to women-led innovation and entrepreneurship. While these are noble economic goals, the committee must hear from medical experts on how to ensure these social and economic objectives do not distract from the biological heart of the bill. For this framework to be truly transformative, it must remain laser-focused on sex-based biological differences and the documented variations across racial and ethnic groups.

We need to hear from clinicians about why certain populations, such as South Asian or Black women, experience different disease progressions. By ensuring the framework stays grounded in clinical evidence, we ensure it remains a reliable medical tool for generations to come.

Honourable senators, I raise these points as a supportive critic, with the belief that when the federal government provides a coordinated vision, we can solve the most pressing health crises facing our majority population.

For any framework to truly work, it must be disciplined, clinically focused and constitutionally respectful.

Our daughters and granddaughters and future generations of women deserve to grow up in a Canada where their symptoms are not dismissed as anxiety, where their medical dosages are calculated for their bodies and where their cultural background is factored into their care.

Thank you, Senator Henkel, for elevating women's health to the national stage, where it deserves to be. Thank you.

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

Hon. Senators: Yes.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time.)

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

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

(On motion of Senator Henkel, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.)

• (2230)

STUDY ON PRACTICE OF INCLUDING NON-FINANCIAL MATTERS IN BILLS IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS OF BUDGETS AND ECONOMIC STATEMENTS

FIFTH REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE REPLACED WITH CORRECTED VERSION

Hon. Krista Ross: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(k), I move:

> That the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, entitled *Omnibus Budget Bills: A growing problem*, tabled in the Senate on March 24, 2026, be replaced with a corrected version of the report adopted by the committee on March 25, 2026. In the earlier version of the report, a witness made a small error in explaining an element of a Senate proceeding, which the committee only discovered was incorrect afterwards. The correction is to ensure that the Senate proceeding is correctly described in the report.

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

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Ordered, That the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, entitled *Omnibus Budget Bills: A growing problem*, tabled in the Senate on March 24, 2026, be replaced with a corrected version.)

THE HONOURABLE JUDITH G. SEIDMAN

INQUIRY—DEBATE CONCLUDED

On the Order:

> Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Martin, calling the attention of the Senate to the career of the Honourable Judith Seidman.

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Honourable senators, thank you. I know it's late, but you know that I never speak for long. I promise you I will be quick.

Honourable colleagues, some individuals leave an imprint on this chamber through a steady presence that never needs amplification. Former senator Judith Seidman has been such a figure. Her work reflected a quiet determination shaped by thoughtful judgment and an unwavering sense of responsibility toward Canadians.

During her years here, she carried out the duties of Opposition Whip with characteristic discipline and calm authority, balancing the demands of the role with a steady respect for the institution and for the people who worked alongside her. It is a position I now hold, and I am mindful each day of the standard she set. Her approach to leadership showed how structure and compassion can coexist and how a firm hand can still feel fair.

Former Senator Seidman has always spoken from a place anchored in principle. When her conscience urged her to rise, she did so without hesitation, offering clarity in moments that needed it and guiding difficult discussions with patience. Her voice encouraged others to look more closely, to question assumptions and to consider the human impact behind every policy.

Here I will quote Rumi, as I often do when I pay tribute to my colleagues. Rumi once wrote, "Let the beauty we love be what we do."

Former Senator Seidman embodied this idea in her public life. Her devotion to the well-being of others shaped the questions she pursued and the positions she defended, creating a record marked by care and sincerity rather than self-assertion.

On a personal level, my time with former Senator Seidman has been marked by many quiet evenings over dinner, where conversation flowed easily and friendship took root. I had the chance to introduce her to food from my region, and although she is known for her love of oatmeal and salad, she embraced those dishes with genuine delight. When her retirement approached, I offered to host a small lunch in her honour, as I have done for others, but in her characteristically modest way, she declined. Instead, she asked me for one more dinner together — and where did she want to go? To a South Asian restaurant that we frequented.

Former Senator Seidman, now that you've moved into the next chapter of your life, please rest assured that the mark you left here endures. Your leadership, steadiness and commitment to principle will continue to guide those of us who follow the path you once walked.

You carry with you our profound respect and gratitude for all that you have given. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Hon. the Speaker: If no other senator wishes to speak, this item is considered debated.

(Debate concluded.)

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 10:36 p.m., the Senate was continued until Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at 2 p.m.*)

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