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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,  
Speaker

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## THE SENATE

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

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

Prayers.

### SENATORS' STATEMENTS

#### SUPPORT FOR SYRIA

**Hon. Mohammad Al Zaibak:** Honourable senators, I was born in Syria, and I know what it means to love a country and to watch it suffer. I also know what it means to find refuge in a country as generous as Canada. It is from that place — personal and deeply felt — that I rise today.

On April 17, Syrians marked their Independence Day — Eid al-Jala'a — commemorating the end of the French occupation and the birth of a sovereign Syrian state in 1946. This year marks the eightieth anniversary of that milestone.

And after nearly 60 years of suffering under an authoritarian regime, including 14 years of devastating violence and armed struggle, this anniversary stands as a powerful symbol of resilience and hope for a more stable and peaceful future.

It is in that spirit that I acknowledge an important step taken by the Government of Canada.

On February 18, Canada announced amendments to the Special Economic Measures (Syria) Regulations, lifting restrictions on trade and financial activity. As a Syrian-born Canadian senator, I extend my sincere gratitude to the Right Honourable Mark Carney and his government for this strategic decision.

This is not simply a technical adjustment. It is a signal of hope with real, tangible consequences. It means that Syrian Canadians can now send remittances to their families through legitimate Canadian banks and financial institutions. It means that Canadians of Syrian origin can begin investing in rebuilding their devastated homeland.

It opens doors for Canadian companies with world-class expertise in engineering, construction, finance and technology to participate and co-invest in Syria's reconstruction — a rebuilding effort estimated to cost over \$500 billion. Canada is not standing on the sidelines; it is stepping forward.

For the Syrian-Canadian community, including more than 100,000 Syrian newcomers who have made Canada their home since 2015, this moment carries profound meaning.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all Canadians who stood with Syrians in crisis and who opened their arms, hearts and homes to welcome those newcomers. They embody what Canada truly stands for.

Honourable senators, today Canada has once again demonstrated that leadership. I am deeply grateful.

To all Syrians around the world and across this vast and generous country we call home, happy Independence Day. The road ahead is long, but you are not walking it alone.

Thank you. *Meegwetch. Shukran.*

#### PUBLIC HEALTH DISINFORMATION

**Hon. Stan Kutcher:** Honourable senators, the International Congress on Academic Medicine, or ICAM, had its meeting in Ottawa last week, and the keynote presentation was on health disinformation.

This week, Professor Timothy Caulfield and I had the privilege of convening a meeting of national medical, nursing and other health organizations to urge them to take collaborative action against health disinformation. The Canadian Association of Science Centres and ScienceUpFirst were the organizing participants, and they met here yesterday morning.

Friends, health disinformation pervades every segment of our public discourse. It negatively impacts our health status as individuals and society, and it also attacks the well-being of our democracy.

One of the lessons we have learned over the last few years has been about how health disinformation is now resulting in the re-emergence of deadly diseases that we had considered to be eradicated. Measles is an example.

Health disinformation leads to severe negative health outcomes, such as physical harm from unsafe treatments. It undermines trust in scientific authority and puts additional strains on an already stretched health care system. For example, bogus treatments for cancer cost much money and delay or avoid receipt of effective care. Not being vaccinated raises the risk of contracting a serious contagious disease as well as reducing the herd immunity that protects us all.

This health “infodemic” contributes to creating distrust in science and public health, and it eventually erodes trust in our democratic institutions. Sadly, the rise in health disinformation that we saw during the COVID pandemic has not relented.

Now with the dismantling of trustworthy health institutions in the U.S. under the Trump administration and with the elevation of snake oil salesmen and sycophants to positions of health authority, health disinformation floods us from our neighbour to the south.

It is aided, abetted and amplified by malignant state actors such as Russia and wellness entrepreneurs. The former as part of hybrid warfare is designed to foment internal political chaos; the latter is simply to make money.

Our government has not, to date, mounted an effective counter to health disinformation despite many attempts by members of this chamber to encourage them to do so. Learning from other places that have created effective approaches to addressing disinformation, like Finland, Taiwan and Ukraine, we find that civil society must work to create the structures that can and will do so.

For this to happen, our trusted health organizations must come together in a coalition to deal with health disinformation. The health of Canadians is too important for them to not act.

Can they do it? Yes, they can. Will they do it? They said they would.

Thank you.

#### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Andrea Seale, Chief Executive Officer, and Christopher Wein, Board Chair of the Canadian Cancer Society. They are accompanied today by other members of the organization's leadership team. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Cardozo.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

• (1410)

#### CANCER AWARENESS DAY IN THE SENATE

**Hon. Andrew Cardozo:** Honourable senators, I want to thank members of the Canadian Cancer Society from across Canada for joining us today, as I want to thank all of you who joined us for the group picture to mark cancer awareness day in the Senate.

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada. Shockingly, over 40% of Canadians will get cancer at some point in their lives, and 26% will die. Please permit me to put this in personal terms. There are about 100 of us in the Senate. If we look around the room, 40 of us will be diagnosed with cancer during our lifetimes — some of us have already been there — and 26 of us will die prematurely from cancer. That's the statistic.

There is hardly a family in Canada that has not been marked by this pernicious disease. It is projected that in this year, 2026, there will be 254,000 new cancer cases and 88,000 deaths from cancer. Lung, breast, prostate and colorectal cancers are the most common, together making up nearly half of the cases. There are over 200 different types of cancers affecting organs, blood, bone marrow and the immune system.

Colleagues, this is the second time we are marking cancer awareness day in the Senate as part of the annual Daffodil Month. Every spring, the Canadian Cancer Society rallies together around the daffodil so Canadians can show support and

help people with cancer live longer, fuller lives. The daffodil is the first flower to bloom in the spring, and for those living with cancer it is a symbol of hope.

There are many issues that need attention by federal and provincial governments, such as improving access to health care, better data collection, boosting palliative care, encouraging prevention, raising investment in cancer research and funding for drugs for rare cancers and clinical trials.

As the Senate co-chair of the parliamentary cancer caucus, I want to thank my House of Commons counterparts, members of Parliament Peter Schiefke and Dan Albas, for their service. I encourage you to join the caucus so we can work further on this pressing need.

You will be receiving the group pictures we took a few minutes ago wearing our daffodils, or please take your own pictures. But most importantly, please post them to increase awareness of this urgent need and demonstrate our support for this.

I want to salute those living with cancer, and I want to sincerely thank our guests from the Canadian Cancer Society and all those working to fight cancer across the country. Together we can and will make a difference.

Thank you.

#### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Dan Albas, member of Parliament, and Peter Schiefke, member of Parliament, who are the co-chairs of the parliamentary cancer caucus. They are the guests of the Honourable Senators Muggli and Cardozo.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Dr. Cynthia Slade and Gertrude Muise, representatives of the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Ravalia.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

#### NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

**Hon. Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia:** Honourable senators, I rise today on behalf of my fellow Newfoundland and Labrador senators to recognize the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association, or NLMA, and the essential role it plays in strengthening health care for the people of our province.

The NLMA represents the medical profession and advocates for patients, with a mission to support excellent health care and provide leadership on the major system issues affecting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

For more than a century, and especially in recent years, the NLMA has been a steady voice for patients, physicians and a stronger public health care system. It has helped shape important discussions on physician recruitment and retention, access to primary care, digital health, peer review and the broader health system reforms needed to meet the needs of our aging and dispersed population.

Collaborative efforts with nursing and allied health groups help to ensure that a robust team-based approach to care is patient focused.

Physician wellness and gender equity have long been a focus of the association. I am thankful for the work that our current president, Dr. Cynthia Slade, and our CEO, Gertrie Muise, and their colleagues do on behalf of Newfoundland physicians and citizens. Thank you.

The NLMA's work matters because health care is not built by policy alone; it depends on the insight of those who work every day at the bedside, in the clinic, in the operating room and in the community. The association brings that practical expertise to the table, while always keeping the interests of patients at the centre.

I want to thank the NLMA, its leadership and its members for their dedication and continued partnership in the service of better health care for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[*Translation*]

### CULTURAL JOURNALISM

**Hon. René Cormier:** Honourable senators, on the eve of World Book and Copyright Day, I want to pay tribute to the cultural journalists who have promoted literature, arts and culture throughout their careers. About two months ago, we learned of the sudden passing of radio host and columnist Franco Nuovo, who worked for Radio-Canada for over 20 years.

A great lover of arts and culture, Franco Nuovo was part of a long-standing tradition of journalists and broadcasters who devoted their careers to promoting the importance of arts and culture in our society. Like René Homier-Roy, one of his colleagues who also passed away recently, Franco Nuovo epitomized professionalism and rigour, two qualities that characterize our public broadcaster.

By giving a voice to artists, creators and thinkers, cultural journalists help the public better understand the works, trends and issues that shape Canada's cultural identity. They help build the sphere of influence that enables the arts to play such a transformative role in society.

Through its programs, series, interviews and documentaries, Radio-Canada's television and radio channels strive to reflect the country's diverse voices and accents. For Canada's

[ Senator Ravalia ]

francophones, especially those living in communities where French is the minority language, Radio-Canada gives them a space to live, a place where the French language is valued, thriving and being passed on. It helps strengthen our sense of belonging, preserve our collective memory and promote francophone culture from sea to sea to sea. By serving as a cultural mediator, it brings the arts within reach and makes them an integral part of daily life for both francophones or francophiles.

Not only does cultural journalism promote the arts, it also plays a critical, fundamental role. It analyzes, questions and puts cultural productions in perspective, fostering public debate and collective thought. This exacting, independent approach delivers coverage that far transcends mere entertainment by positioning culture as a pillar of democracy.

At a time of globalization and heightened competition from digital platforms, cultural journalism acts as a bulwark by protecting the visibility of local culture and as a multiplier by increasing the number of people active in the sector. It supports homegrown content, celebrates emerging voices and strengthens our sense of belonging. It is a vital tool for preserving and renewing francophone cultural heritage.

The work of cultural journalists across the country is more essential than ever. Thank you to Franco Nuovo, René Homier-Roy, Anne-Marie Parenteau in Acadia and all the others, who serve as "lamplighters," people who help deepen our understanding and appreciation of the richness of Canadian cultural production.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues, Senator Julie Miville-Dechéne, Senator Paula Simons and Senator Pamela Wallin, who had distinguished careers as journalists before joining the upper chamber.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[*English*]

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### ADJOURNMENT

#### NOTICE OF MOTION

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

That, when the Senate next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until Tuesday, April 28, 2026, at 2 p.m.

• (1420)

**CANADA-UNITED STATES  
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP**

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS  
WESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE, JULY 9-12, 2024—  
REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group concerning the Seventy-seventh Annual Meeting of the Council of State Governments Western Legislative Conference, held in Portland, Oregon, United States of America, from July 9 to 12, 2024.

REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION, JULY 15-18, 2024—  
REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group concerning the Republican National Convention, held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, United States of America, from July 15 to 18, 2024.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS  
MIDWESTERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE,  
JULY 21-24, 2024—REPORT TABLED

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group concerning the Seventy-eighth Annual Meeting of the Council of State Governments Midwestern Legislative Conference, held in Columbus, Ohio, United States of America, from July 21 to 24, 2024.

**QUESTION PERIOD**

**GLOBAL AFFAIRS**

CANADA-CHINA RELATIONS

**Hon. Michael L. MacDonald:** Senator Moreau, Canadians were deeply concerned — and rightly so — to learn about the Prime Minister's decision to sign an MOU on police cooperation with China during his last trip to Beijing. Canadians are now even more troubled to learn that the RCMP has acknowledged it cannot share key details of the agreement without Beijing's approval. At a time when Beijing has been widely accused of transnational repression, surveillance and intimidation of diaspora communities in Canada, this revelation raises serious questions about your government's judgment and commitment to transparency.

How can the Carney government justify entering an opaque law-enforcement arrangement with a regime that does not respect the rule of law or independent oversight?

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

I already answered, concerning agreements with China, that the government remains committed to engaging with China in a matter that is consistent with Canadian values, interests, international obligations and public security.

Concerning public security, you know that for security purposes not everything can be public. That being said, the government is of the opinion that having an economic agreement with China is to the benefit of Canada. As a matter of fact, just ask our agricultural producers. They know there are direct benefits to having an economic agreement with China.

That being said, we are not —

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

**Senator MacDonald:** I'm not sure if that was an answer.

Senator Moreau, can you confirm what specific oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that any information-sharing or joint investigative activities with Chinese law enforcement cannot be used to target Canadians or undermine our national security?

**Senator Moreau:** National security is of the utmost importance for the government. We are taking all necessary measures to ensure our sovereignty and the security of the Canadian public. That's a very strong government commitment with respect to China or any other country in the world.

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES

**Hon. Salma Atallahjan:** Government leader, despite seemingly positive recruitment figures announced by the Canadian Armed Forces this week, one serious challenge continues to worsen regarding participation of women in the active forces. While targeted recruitment campaigns and adjustments to pay and benefits have been introduced, the commander responsible for recruitment has warned that the forces remain far from the 25% target for women and that, at the current pace, that target will never be achieved.

Serving members and potential recruits continue to raise serious concerns about the work-based culture, including persistent sexual harassment, systemic barriers and a lack of meaningful structural reform.

Why has your government failed to translate repeated commitments into real progress to ensure the Canadian Armed Forces meets its obligations to women who serve or wish to serve?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** We are committed to implementing the report that was tabled concerning the Canadian Armed Forces.

As far as recruitment is concerned, it is at a 30-year high and on an upward trajectory, even if there is more to do.

As far as the recruitment of women is concerned, women have been contributing — and I'm sure Senator Patterson will agree with me — to the important work conducted by our Armed Forces. The Canadian Armed Forces set a target of 25% representation of women overall, effective following the Deschamps report in 2015. Women represent 17% of current recruitment but just 4.4% in the combat arms.

There is still much work that remains, but the government is committed to doing it.

**Senator Ataullahjan:** Senator Moreau, the issue is not only recruitment but retention. Last year alone, 1,070 women left the Canadian Armed Forces, the highest attrition rate since 2021.

While overall recruitment numbers may show growth, wouldn't you agree that continued under-representation of women in those figures risks further entrenching the very workplace culture that is driving them out of the forces? How can Canadians have confidence that current policies are addressing the root causes of this attrition?

**Senator Batters:** Exactly.

**Senator Moreau:** I think the figures I pointed out earlier are quite promising. We have unprecedented recruitment levels.

As far as women are concerned, we know that we are improving. We are not at the target yet, but we are working on it. We are working both on recruitment and retention. It's a very strong commitment.

We have unprecedented investments in the Canadian Armed Forces, and this —

[*Translation*]

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

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### CANADA-U.S. TRADE

**Hon. Martine Hébert:** Government Representative, in the U.S. Congress once again this morning, the Secretary of Commerce, Mr. Lutnick, reiterated the concessions he wants Canada to make in advance. As we know, negotiations are at a critical juncture and are not easy, to say the least.

[ Senator Ataullahjan ]

Yesterday, Prime Minister Carney announced the creation of a new Advisory Committee on Canada-U.S. Economic Relations. It's worth noting that this committee is made up of people from various backgrounds from across Canada, including business people, union members and experts. Could you explain exactly what this committee's mandate is and what it will do?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** Before I explain the advisory committee's mandate, I would like to remind senators of something that the Prime Minister said today. He made it very clear that, regardless of what the Americans may say, the U.S. will not be unilaterally dictating the terms of the negotiations on the review of the free trade agreement.

The advisory committee that was announced yesterday will serve as a forum for expertise and strategy on all aspects of the Canada-U.S. economic relationship. As you no doubt noticed from its composition, the advisory committee is quite large. It includes all sorts of people, including representatives of major sectors of the Canadian economy, unions and employers, along with former prime ministers and even former federal opposition leaders. I believe the committee —

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

**Senator Hébert:** Government Representative, can you tell us whether the government intends to do something similar with the premiers or provincial representatives? Last fall, we saw that unexpected moves made by certain provinces, even if well-intentioned, can have a major impact on the negotiations. Can you tell us whether the government intends to implement a similar process with the provinces?

• (1430)

**Senator Moreau:** The government is in constant contact with the provinces, especially concerning the renewal of the free trade agreement. I have no doubt that conversations are taking place between the Prime Minister and the premiers.

In terms of its composition, the committee includes two former premiers, one from Nunavut and one from Quebec, Mr. Charest, someone I hold in the highest regard, as well as Mr. O'Toole. They will certainly be able to provide good advice and set the stage for collaboration between the provinces and the federal government.

[*English*]

### CANADA INVESTMENT SUMMIT

**Hon. Tony Loffreda:** My question is for the Government Representative in the Senate.

Last week, the Prime Minister announced we would be hosting the Canada Investment Summit in Toronto this year, bringing together the world's leading investors, CEOs and global business leaders with the goal of unlocking significant new capital and showcasing Canada's economic strengths. However, beyond attracting foreign capital, Canada must also showcase the very

companies that are building the future. Canadian scale-ups and high-growth firms, rooted in innovation and entrepreneurship, represent some of our greatest untapped assets.

Can the government confirm whether it will include Canadian scale-ups as a central feature of the summit's agenda, ensuring they have a platform to present their innovations, attract investment and demonstrate to the world that Canada is not only a destination for capital but a source of globally competitive companies?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you, Senator Loffreda. I cannot confirm the content of the agenda at this time, but I can assure you that my office has raised the issue directly with the Prime Minister's Office. However, I can say that this summit is designed to showcase the very best of Canada's economy, bringing together global investors, entrepreneurs and business leaders to unlock major investment opportunities here at home. We're delighted to have that investment summit.

The Prime Minister has been clear that Canada is just the station for capital. We are a source of world-class innovation, talent and high-growth companies competing globally.

**Senator Loffreda:** Thank you for that answer and for raising the issue. As Canada seeks to attract increased foreign investment through the summit, how will the government ensure that Canadian innovation and intellectual property remain anchored in Canada? More specifically, what measures will be put in place to ensure that Canadian scale-ups and businesses remain in Canadian hands, continue to grow domestically and contribute to our long-term economic sovereignty rather than being acquired or relocated abroad?

**Senator Moreau:** The short answer would be the Strategic Response Fund. Canada has a clear strategy to retain and commercialize intellectual property domestically with over \$150 million in direct support in intellectual property, or IP, allowing firms to scale and keep high-value activities here at home. Budget 2025 reinforced this by prioritizing homegrown innovation, commercialization and domestic ownership capacity in key sectors like artificial intelligence, or AI, and advanced manufacturing. These are the programs, such as the strategic response —

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

## ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### CLEAN FUEL REGULATIONS

**Hon. Todd Lewis:** Senator Moreau, I'm sure that many members of this chamber will be surprised to learn that Canada is the United States' number one export market for ethanol. American ethanol, which supplies 60% of the Canadian market, can be produced more cheaply than Canadian ethanol because the U.S. government subsidizes American farmers and American ethanol plants. Meanwhile, the Canadian government applies an industrial carbon tax to ethanol plants operating in Canada, but no surcharges apply to the ethanol we import.

While American plants expand every year to meet Canadian demand, Canadian ethanol plants haven't grown since 2018. Canadian producers sell into the Canadian market at the same price as their U.S. counterparts, meaning their profits are much lower. Is the government contemplating changes to ensure that Canadian ethanol producers can compete on a level playing field?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you, Senator Lewis. That's a very important question, and I agree with the preamble of your question.

The Clean Fuel Regulations strengthen our economy and energy security and protect our climate to keep life affordable. On September 5, 2025, the government announced a new set of measures to support industries impacted by recent global trade pressures, including the biofuel sector.

I can inform you that, as part of these, the government will provide targeted amendments to the Clean Fuel Regulations to support the domestic biofuel sector while maintaining the regulations' primary focus on reducing emissions from fuels.

**Senator Lewis:** Thank you for that, Senator Moreau. Ethanol is blended into every tank of gasoline sold to Canadian consumers and drivers. This policy is a made-in-Canada trade irritant that is hindering our Canadian ethanol producers. The comment period for amendments to Canada's Clean Fuel Regulations was closed on January 15, 2026. Stakeholders are looking forward to Environment and Climate Change Canada, or ECCC, publishing the updated regulations.

**Senator Moreau:** Thank you again. I can confirm that the government is currently reviewing the submissions it received on the discussion paper and will develop amendments in consultation with provinces and territories, as well as stakeholders. That discussion is already taking place.

[Translation]

## PUBLIC SAFETY

### FORCED LABOUR

**Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne:** Senator Moreau, the Department of Public Safety is responsible for implementing the law on forced labour in our supply chains, a law that I sponsored and that has been in force since 2024. A few days ago, however, researchers from the University of British Columbia and McMaster University publicly criticized the weak guidelines that this department issued to companies. The companies' reports contain extremely vague descriptions of their alleged efforts to weed out forced labour, and their filings scored an average of 36% on specificity. Will you be issuing stricter guidelines to improve transparency?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** Senator Miville-Dechêne, the Minister of Public Safety was with us yesterday for Question Period.

**Senator Miville-Dechêne:** I didn't have time to ask any questions.

**Senator Moreau:** I know, and I'm not criticizing you. I'm simply saying that I can't speak to what the intentions might be or what measures might be taken. The minister would have been in a better position than I am to speak to that.

However, I must point out that, in the same study you cited, it's worth noting that 100% of the companies that were analyzed had implemented accountability policies regarding forced labour in their supply chains, which is a step forward because companies hadn't been doing so in the past.

We are well aware that there's still work to be done. The government remains firmly committed to combatting forced labour and improving the situation with respect to the numbers and statistics you cited.

**Senator Miville-Dechêne:** Naturally, it's better to report than not to report.

However, isn't there some urgency to strengthening these guidelines, considering that the United States suspects Canada of doing too little to fight forced labour at its borders? The law is fundamentally sound and could be used to push back against Washington, but not if its implementation is substandard or if its powers are not used to fine offending companies — which is currently the case, since no penalties have been issued.

**Senator Moreau:** The government is aware that the U.S. has launched several new investigations under section 301.

Canada disagrees with the U.S. interpretation. The U.S. says that we are not doing enough at the border, but our investments have been unprecedented. We do not agree. Just because the Americans make a statement does not necessarily mean that it's backed by verified facts.

Canada, Mexico and the U.S. collaborated closely on establishing our respective prohibitions, and we have —

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

[English]

## EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Senator Moreau, as the end of the school year approaches, young students have a bleak challenge finding a summer job, and those who are graduating permanently from school are facing the worst job market for young people in the history of this country dating back to the 1990s. We've had 10 years of bad economic policies

[ Senator Moreau ]

by the Liberal government, which has resulted in a situation where young Canadians feel hopeless. They can't buy homes. They can't rent apartments.

We have a situation where the data is clear: 14% unemployment amongst young people. That's double the national average. The employment rate, as I have said, is at the lowest level we've seen in many decades.

Why is it, Senator Moreau, that young Canadians are losing hope in this once great country? They're losing hope in their institutions, and are seeing, for the first time, a bleak, bleak future. That was something that was unheard of just a few years ago.

• (1440)

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** There are many parts of your question with which I totally disagree.

First, we're making unprecedented investments to ensure that young Canadians can afford a house or rent.

In a previous Question Period, Senator Cardozo asked many questions about youth employment. The government is committed to improving youth employment, and we are actually working on it. I remember that his question specifically addressed summer jobs for youth. We're working on it. The government is committed to improving the economy in order to benefit every Canadian, including our young Canadians.

**Senator Housakos:** You're not working on it fast enough because any single statistic you look at over the last couple of weeks has youth unemployment in this country anywhere from 15% to as high as 20.8%. That's unacceptable. These are the types of unemployment rates we would expect from underdeveloped countries when it comes to youth employment.

We have an economic statement that we're expecting from the government over the next couple of weeks. Will that statement have something specific to give some hope to young Canadians, or will it mean more taxes and spending and the discouragement of economic growth?

**Senator Moreau:** The facts are very different from the description you're giving, Senator Housakos. Total employment is up by 148,000 jobs over the last year, with 149,000 more full-time jobs.

The government is creating good jobs and careers for every Canadian, and we're working on jobs for young Canadians as well. Implementing the Strategic Response Fund and the Work-Sharing Program to protect our workers against adversarial U.S. policies —

[Translation]

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

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

[English]

**ANTI-SEMITISM**

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Senator Moreau, we are learning of yet another pro-terror event that was held at a federally funded community centre in Montreal. Anti-Semitic and extremist remarks were made, glorifying acts of violence and torture. The event was organized by the Palestinian Youth Movement and is linked to designated terrorist groups, such as Samidoun and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. This raises serious questions about how taxpayer money is being managed. How does your government justify using federal funds to provide a platform for anti-Semitism and the glorification of terrorism?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** Senator Housakos, I must strongly disagree with the assertion that Canada is encouraging anti-Semitism. That part of the question is nonsense. The government believes that there is no place for anti-Semitism in Canada. In fact, through the Canada Community Security Program, the government has increased the budget by \$10 million, specifically for projects for places of worship and for Jewish communities, including schools, community centres and synagogues. Stop saying that the government is encouraging anti-Semitism. First, it is not true, and second, it goes against Canadian values. We believe that Canada is no place for anti-Semitism, nor is it a place for any other form of hate or detestation.

We are currently studying Bill C-9, along with Senator Wells, precisely to prevent —

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

**Senator Housakos:** Senator Moreau, acts of anti-Semitism are reaching record levels in Canada. We need to react quickly. The Jewish community warned the federal ministers of immigration and Canadian identity, but no action has been taken on these cases. Why should Canadians believe that the government takes anti-Semitism seriously or that it will act on the Senate report when our Jewish community is raising the alarm and being ignored? It's good that the Senate did its job properly on this issue—

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Thank you, Senator Housakos.

**Senator Moreau:** Senator Housakos, the Minister of Public Safety was here yesterday. You said that it was understandable that he had not yet read the report since it was only released yesterday morning. The minister had the report in hand and promised to review it. We need to put things in perspective. We are currently working on a very important bill, Bill C-9, which seeks to directly respond to this type of situation. That is a firm commitment from the government. I would encourage all senators to work to quickly pass and implement Bill C-9.

**NATIONAL DEFENCE****MILITARY SPENDING**

**Hon. Percy E. Downe:** My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

As you know, Prince Edward Islanders have always participated in any wars and conflicts as required by the nation, from the Boer War onward, but we're in the unique situation now of being the only province in Canada that does not have a full-time military base. However, we do have active reserve units. They need infrastructure updates. Do you know if the government is considering that in their plans for defence spending?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** Thank you for the question. Personally, I was not aware that Prince Edward Island is the only province not to have that kind of infrastructure. I will certainly raise the question with the minister, and I will get back to you on whether there are plans for investment in Prince Edward Island as far as military infrastructure is concerned.

**Senator Downe:** Thank you very much. As you know, Prime Minister Carney recently announced a \$3-billion investment in the Maritimes. It did not include Prince Edward Island. It included New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

The reserve units are very important. We have an Army Reserve and a Naval Reserve. We also found out that we're now the only province that does not have an Air Force Reserve. The importance of the reserves, of course, is that many members go on to serve in the permanent force, and it's great training for young people.

The request is for around \$200 million. My question is this: Could you inquire of Minister McGuinty if plans are under way?

**Senator Moreau:** Your question is more of a suggestion, and it's certainly a good one. I will bring that suggestion to the minister, and I will promptly report back to you.

**WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY****SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ2+ PEOPLE**

**Hon. Kristopher Wells:** Senator Moreau, on the occasion of the Ottawa Civic Space Summit being held here this week, which brings together global leaders towards advanced democracy, civic space and human rights, the Canadian Pride Caucus was pleased to welcome Deputy Minister Mmapaseka Steve Letsike of South Africa and Jessica Stern of the Alliance for Diplomacy and Justice, both of whom are internationally recognized advocates for the human rights of LGBTQ2+ people.

As communities are often on the front line of attacks from authoritarian governments, can the Canadian government assure us that Canada will continue to advance support for democracy, civil space and the human rights of LGBTQ2+ people in our foreign policy and international assistance?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** I would say, Senator Wells, that the answer lies within the question itself. Certainly, the government stands behind any initiative that would protect all Canadians and promote an understanding of all Canadians and all groups, including, specifically, LGBTQ2+ groups.

**Senator K. Wells:** Thank you for that response. Can you outline what concrete actions Canada is taking through diplomacy, funding and multilateral engagement to support and protect LGBTQ2+ human rights defenders and civil society organizations operating in increasingly hostile environments abroad?

**Senator Moreau:** We're well aware that there is a hostile environment surrounding those groups, but I will provide you a written answer to that question because it's quite specific, and you will want to know all that the government is doing internationally to protect and promote them. I will get back to you with a written answer.

## CANADIAN HERITAGE

### SPORT IN CANADA

**Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition):** Senator Moreau, I have a question of extreme national importance. We've now seen over the last few years that the government can't tackle the problem of reducing taxes. You can't solve the problem that young people are unable to buy homes or rent apartments. How can we count on the government now to really push back on Donald Trump, who, since the last Olympic Games, thinks he owns our national sport of hockey?

What is the government doing to ensure that, in this year's Stanley Cup finals, we're going to see two Canadian teams meet?

**Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate):** I can't answer the question for good reason.

• (1450)

I was unable to watch the hockey game yesterday on my TV set at the apartment because it's been newly installed. Yesterday, I had a discussion with other members of the Senate. They all want to see the Montreal Canadiens play the Edmonton Oilers in the Stanley Cup Final. I'm not sure it will happen, but let's hope together.

If we work together in our positions as leaders, maybe we will reach that.

[ Senator Wells (Alberta) ]

**Senator Housakos:** Senator Moreau, I am concerned. A couple of days ago, in the House of Commons, one of the government's parliamentary secretaries didn't know the difference between Connor McDavid and Conor McGregor. That brings concerns.

My real question is the following: Since you're so good at taxing Canadians, will the government finally put a tax on players like Kirby Dach who played as bad as he did yesterday? Are you prepared to tax him for that poor performance?

**Senator Moreau:** I don't want to disappoint you, but we will not follow Conservative advice on taxation.

[Translation]

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### CRIMINAL CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Wells (*Alberta*), seconded by the Honourable Senator Cardozo, for the second reading of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places).

**Hon. Baltej S. Dhillon:** Honourable senators, I rise today because hatred continues to find a foothold here in Canada, not in every heart, nor even in most, but in enough hearts to shatter lives, silence voices and cause people to wonder whether they truly belong in this country.

[English]

In March of this year, a 22-year-old Sikh man named Birinder Singh was on a road trip near Leduc, Alberta — laughing with his friends, living his life — when someone extended what appeared to be a peace sign from a passing truck. Birinder returned the gesture. Moments later, shots rang out. A bullet struck him in the neck. The truck sped away. He did not survive.

The RCMP ruled the motive unclear. The investigation has not classified his killing as a hate crime. And so a family buries their son, a community mourns one of its own and a question none of us can answer with confidence hangs in the air: Did he die in part because of who he was? That uncertainty — where accountability should be — is precisely why we are here today.

I want to begin by acknowledging the government's intention in bringing forward Bill C-9. I also want to acknowledge Senator Kris Wells, who is leading this work with a seriousness and conviction that long predates his arrival in this chamber.

The purpose of this legislation — to confront the rising tide of hatred that is, too often, violent enough to take lives or break spirits — is urgent.

Colleagues, I know what it is to live as a visible minority in this country. I know what it is to walk through the world wearing your faith on your head, literally.

I know the weight of an unwanted stare. I know the sting of words directed not at who you are but at what you look like. And I know the particular exhaustion of existing in a society that asks you again and again to prove that you belong.

Experiencing hate because of perceived differences is personal to me. And I suspect it is personal for many people in communities across this country who are watching us today.

Colleagues, April is Sikh Heritage Month in Canada. This past weekend, I had the privilege of attending the launch of the first-ever seminal report on anti-Sikh hate in Canada, produced by the World Sikh Organization of Canada.

More than 1,600 Sikhs were interviewed across this country. Nationwide town halls were convened. The findings were not surprising to those who live this reality, but it should be galvanizing to all of us who govern. Let me share them with you.

Over 80% of respondents said that hate and discrimination against Sikhs have increased in the past five years. Nearly two thirds reported experiencing verbal harassment. And over 70% of victims chose not to report those incidents at all, citing futility, fear of retaliation or a complete absence of institutional support.

Let that number settle in, colleagues: 7 in 10 victims of hate remain silent because they don't believe that anything will be done. This silence is not unique to the Sikh community. Anti-Black hate, anti-Indigenous hate, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia and transphobia are all rising.

Official statistics almost certainly undercount the true scale of the problem. Every unreported incident is a person who has quietly accepted that the law will not protect them. That is what hatred does to a society. It wounds individuals and teaches entire communities to expect less.

Consider another case. In 2023, a 21-year-old Sikh student named Gagandeep Singh was brutally assaulted at a bus stop in British Columbia. His dastar — his turban, a sacred article of his faith — was violently removed. He was dragged, punched repeatedly and suffered a concussion.

The BC Prosecution Service ultimately declined to approve charges because a conviction was not considered likely.

Gagandeep's friend said something afterward that has stayed with me:

I don't think it matters if you're black, brown, grey, or yellow. At the end of the day, you should feel safe taking public transportation . . .

Colleagues, I support the intention of this legislation. But good intentions still warrant scrutiny. I have some thoughts I wish to offer to this chamber and to our colleagues on the Human Rights Committee who will examine this bill closely.

The first is about making the new hate crime offence truly implementable, giving those who must enforce the tools to do so.

The second is about the Attorney General consent provision and whether there is another way to achieve its underlying purpose.

Let me address each in turn.

The new hate crime offence created by clause 5 of Bill C-9 is a meaningful and welcome addition to our criminal law. Hatred will not merely be an aggravating factor at sentencing — it will be the offence itself. That is a signal worth sending.

But a law is only as strong as the institutions that enforce it. And to enforce this law well, our police services and Crown prosecutors will need to be equipped in ways they currently are not.

Proving hate motivation is not straightforward. It requires investigators who understand the cultural, social and ideological contexts in which hate operates. It also requires a shared institutional framework across jurisdictions so that this offence is applied consistently.

The case of Birinder Singh is instructive here. The RCMP investigation determined the shooting was a "one-off" and not hate-motivated. The suspect has been charged with second-degree murder. And perhaps that is the right outcome on the evidence that is available.

But we must ask: Do our police services have the training, the cultural competency and the investigative frameworks to recognize hate motivation when it presents itself in unfamiliar forms? Do they know what to look for? Do they know how to document it?

The World Sikh Organization of Canada's report speaks directly to this. Among its recommendations is a call for Justice Canada to issue prosecution guidelines and training on effectively proving hate motivation using anti-Sikh cases as concrete examples.

I would go further. Those guidelines should be national in scope, adequately funded and subject to regular review as the nature of hate evolves.

• (1500)

Passing this legislation is step one. Investing in the capacity to enforce it is step two, and it deserves as much attention in this chamber as step one.

My second thought involves clauses 3 and 4 of the bill, which preserve the requirement for Attorney General consent before prosecuting hate propaganda offences.

The original version of this bill removed the Attorney General consent provision entirely. That change was recommended by former provincial attorneys general and also featured in a 2024 House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights report on heightened anti-Semitism.

Following further consultations, and concerns from religious groups, the decision was made to reinstate the provision. Senator Wells explained that the rationale for keeping it was to prevent frivolous prosecutions, which is a genuine concern.

However, is Attorney General consent the right way to preserve judicial independence? For communities already skeptical of institutional protection, a pathway that hinges on a political decision maker may feel as if their safety depends on whoever holds office.

The underlying purpose of Attorney General consent — to evaluate complex, sensitive cases carefully and ensure that doing so is in the public interest — is sound. But that purpose is better served by independent provincial prosecution services or the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Crown counsel already make these complex judgments daily, weighing public interest, assessing conviction thresholds and exercising discretion free from political direction.

I would ask my colleagues in committee to consider whether transferring this function to those independent bodies would better serve both judicial independence and the confidence of the communities this bill is meant to protect.

Colleagues, once a police officer, always a police officer, so allow me to speak for a moment about deterrence, which is central to the objectives of our criminal justice system.

In the 1980s, Canada confronted another form of serious, under-reported, cyclical violence: intimate partner violence. The response was not only legislative; provinces adopted what became known as pro-charge and pro-prosecution policies: directives that required police to lay charges when there were reasonable grounds to believe an offence had occurred in a domestic context.

The purpose of those policies was to increase victim safety, improve reporting, reduce reoffending and send a clear societal message that intimate partner violence is a public safety matter, not a private one.

The evidence suggests they worked. For instance, research in London, Ontario, found that police-laid charges in intimate partner cases rose from 3% in 1979 to 89% by 1990. Studies in both Canada and the United States found that arrests produced significantly lower rates of reoffending. Policy and accountability changed behaviour.

I am not drawing a direct equivalence between intimate partner violence and hate crimes. Intimate partner violence is uniquely pervasive, and its dynamics are distinct, but the underlying logic for policy intervention is the same: It is a serious crime that was severely under-reported, deeply under-enforced and cyclical, with victims who did not believe the system would act on their behalf.

Does that sound familiar?

That cycle of hate, silence and impunity will not be broken by legislation alone. We need to think boldly about what the signal of enforcement looks like.

One idea worth considering in cases where a hate crime charge is proven is whether the cost of prosecution — the investigative work and the Crown's resources — should be recoverable from the offender. We impose financial consequences on offenders in other contexts. Where hatred is the animating force behind a serious crime, requiring an offender to bear some of those costs would be a signal that a community's safety should not be taken for granted.

We should also consider the civil dimension. In wrongful death cases or civil lawsuits stemming from hate-motivated offences, the financial and legal burden on surviving families and victims can be immense. Where the Crown determines a case meets the threshold of a serious hate crime, Crown support for civil proceedings could ensure that justice does not depend solely on a family's private capacity to pursue it.

I understand these ideas may not belong in this bill, but they deserve a place in our national conversation about what real accountability for hate looks like.

As our colleagues examine this legislation in committee, I ask that they explore these questions:

First, what additional resources, training and guidelines will be provided to police services and Crown prosecutors across the country to equip them to investigate, charge and prove hate-motivated offences?

Second, on Attorney General consent in clauses 3 and 4, would that gatekeeping function be better served by independent provincial prosecution services — to preserve both judicial independence and public confidence — than by the current political model?

Third, beyond this bill, what else can increase enforcement of hate-motivated offences? Would pro-prosecution and pro-charge frameworks be appropriate? Should offenders bear the cost of prosecution in proven hate crime cases? I believe we must be comprehensive in our approach and utilize every tool available in combatting hate crimes.

Honourable colleagues, I want to return to where I began: Birinder Singh. He died near Leduc on March 14 of this year. He was 22 years old and on a road trip with his friends. He saw what he thought was a peace sign and returned it because that was the kind of person he was. Regardless of whether his death is ever classified as a hate crime, it revealed that the systems we have built to recognize, investigate and prosecute hate are incomplete. Our communities feel unprotected. Too many people in this country have learned, over time, to expect less.

This bill is a step, a sincere and meaningful one, but the test of legislation goes far beyond Royal Assent. Only time will tell whether we are building institutions worthy of the promise of diversity that we keep making or whether we fall short.

I will be following the Human Rights Committee's deliberations closely. I am grateful to colleagues in this chamber who are engaging this legislation with the seriousness it deserves.

Thank you.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Senator Dhillon, your time allowed for debate has expired. Do you want more time to answer questions?

**Senator Dhillon:** If my colleagues will allow.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Is leave granted?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

[Translation]

**Hon. Amina Gerba:** Thank you, Senator Dhillon, for your heartfelt message, your service and the lessons your speech taught us.

My question is for you as a former police officer. I would like to know whether you have heard of racial profiling. If so, how can this bill incorporate that aspect into the legislation?

[English]

**Senator Dhillon:** Thank you for the question.

I think that's a conversation to be had at the Human Rights Committee. Profiling has been an issue over the years, and education certainly helps. Understanding and having a deeper and greater knowledge of all the people whom we serve in this country is where all of this starts. That is why I say education is critical. For this bill to be successful, it is critical that we lift the levels of education, awareness and experience of our law enforcement and front-line officers, because they are the ones who will be facing these questions first.

• (1510)

While we dedicate time, resources and thought to combatting hate crimes, in a similar manner, we also have to ensure that our institutions guarding and protecting us have the same level of understanding, experience and willingness to enforce these laws. Hence my recommendation on following some examples of the past — namely, what has been put in place for intimate partner violence — to ensure there's not only one person reviewing that

particular investigation but also a system and that decisions are not made by one police officer but, rather, a process and a framework.

**Hon. Hassan Yussuff:** Senator Dhillon, thank you very much for your speech. It's hard to comprehend the personal nature of your speech because one can't separate this from oneself.

The context of the legislation speaks to hate. As we know, in this society, none of us is born with hate in our heart or in our head. We learn it. How can a country that is so rich in diversity, culture and people continue to see the Sikh community in a certain way, despite the fact that they have been here as long as many other communities that have occupied this country?

For the Sikh community, hate cannot be separated from race. So how can you fight hate in this legislation if it doesn't also acknowledge that hate is a fundamental part that forms the belief of how certain people are treated?

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Senator Dhillon, would you like more time? We had five minutes for the answer. We're down to 30 seconds. I saw Senator Ataullahjan also standing to ask a question. Would you like more time?

**Senator Dhillon:** Once again, Your Honour, if it's the will of my colleagues, then I'm happy to answer questions.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Is leave granted?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Senator Dhillon:** Thank you, senator, for that question. It's a complex question, and it's part of how we, as a nation, continue to confront these issues. The work is not yet done.

I don't want to lose sight of the fact that we have come a long way, and we have made gains. I'm standing in the Senate.

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

**Senator Dhillon:** I have colleagues on the other side who also serve. We occupy different places in institutions and organizations across this country and commit and contribute every day. As you said, the Sikh community has been here for over a century. I've been dedicated to making this country better for all of us.

To the question of race and hate and religion and faith, I think we all need to do more work on bettering ourselves and learning about each other. Hate thrives in places where ignorance thrives. Hate thrives when we don't make the effort to reach across, lend a smile or shake another person's hand. Hate thrives when we don't stand with each other when someone is being attacked.

The work is on all of us. These bills, this legislation — this is a small step. This is just part of it. Collectively, as a nation, as a community and as leaders, I think there's a lot we can accomplish and a lot we can do that will go beyond this bill. We do need to be consistent in continually monitoring, as I've said in the past, and keeping an eye on how this bill will serve us and Canadians. If that falls short, well, I guess we'll come back to Senator Wells.

**Hon. Salma Ataullahjan:** Senator, will you take another question?

**Senator Dhillon:** Yes. Thank you.

**Senator Ataullahjan:** Listening to you takes me back to the Human Rights Committee when we studied Islamophobia, and we heard consistently that the police hesitate to charge people with hate crimes. We have legislation under which they could do that, yet there's hesitancy. We've talked about cultural sensitivity, especially where Muslims and other racialized people are concerned. They've opened up their places of worship and say, "Ask us any questions," yet the hate continues to grow. We also heard that maybe we should be looking at educating children when they are really young.

What are your feelings about education where the police force is concerned? I've had conversations with police chiefs, and they say, "Yes, we do have cultural sensitivity training," but it doesn't seem to be working. What can we do differently?

**Senator Dhillon:** Thank you for the question. I think you've covered a lot in there.

I would say, from a policing perspective, I've been one of those trainers providing cultural training and race relations training over the years. It helps, but it's a continuous effort. We can't just stop. There's so much more that we need to learn and do when we have to carry both the responsibility and the duty of protecting those we're serving.

To that end, we had a conversation with retired investigator Stephen Camp yesterday, who is a pre-eminent investigator in hate crimes, provides training to the Canadian Police College and has lent his voice in the development of this bill. He will tell you, as he told me, there's more work to be done, and it is not enough to just have legislation. Training is important. Resources are important. It is important that we continue to pay heed to those spaces where we're asking so much of our police officers on the front lines and that they are provided with training and also oversight in how they show up to address some of these crimes.

I have examples of situations where the hakenkreuz was drawn on cemeteries and other places, and they were written off as mischief. That's the risk of not having a process that has oversight within it to ensure that those crimes aren't under-reported or misreported.

If I understood your other question, within the community itself, I think there's a responsibility for accountability on the part of law enforcement agencies and organizations to be providing regular reporting, having interactions with the community and building out systems and networks that can hold them and their work accountable and that their efforts ensure they include that type of training for themselves and they respond in a meaningful way.

[ Senator Ataullahjan ]

I hope that answers your question.

(On motion of Senator Housakos, debate adjourned.)

## NATION-BUILDING VALUE OF TOURISM

### INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

Leave having been given to proceed to Other Business, Inquiries, Order No. 8:

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Sorensen, calling the attention of the Senate to the nation-building value of tourism in Canada.

**Hon. Duncan Wilson:** Honourable senators, I rise today to speak on Senator Sorensen's timely inquiry into the nation-building value of tourism in Canada. It is, in fact, National Tourism Week, and I believe there's a big party down the street tonight.

• (1520)

I would like to thank Senator Sorensen for raising this matter in the Senate, a subject on which I shall speak as a proud British Columbian.

I would also like to express my thanks to my good friend Walt Judas, the former CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of BC, and his team for providing me and my office with excellent information about the tourism sector in my home province.

Just prior to returning from the winter break, I spent the week at the annual Whistler Pride Festival. In addition to skiing and having a great time, the week-long event reminded me of the value of tourism. This event draws visitors from around the world, and a lot of Americans come to the festivities. Through my conversations with these visitors, I was reminded of the value of tourism as a way to build connections with people from outside of Canada and how every Canadian becomes a mini-ambassador through these interactions. These engagements help build bridges, which will create intangible benefits down the road.

[*Translation*]

Honourable colleagues, I would like to point out that this inquiry came at a very good time for British Columbia. Like a number of other regions, the province continues to grapple with sector-specific tariffs.

In British Columbia, the most impactful tariffs are the ones on softwood lumber. In all, 85% of softwood lumber harvested in British Columbia is exported, and two thirds of those exports are shipped to the U.S.

The tariffs levied on this industry have had serious repercussions on the province's usual foreign currency revenues.

However, with a future-oriented approach, we can meet the challenges confronting our traditional exports and generate revenues by focusing more on the value of tourism.

[*English*]

This belief is shared by the Tourism Industry Association of BC within their 2025 Submission to Premier's Task Force on Trade & Economic Security, which states:

By framing tourism as a strategic trade asset, rather than merely a hospitality activity, government can stabilize jobs, tax receipts and regional prosperity while the rest of the economy retools for an uncertain trading environment.

Destination Canada gives a terrific data point that highlights the value of tourism in real and financial terms. Every dollar invested in national tourism marketing yields \$23.85 in economic activity. This is an unrivalled multiplier, and it really provides an eye-popping outlook on the tourism industry's return on investment.

In 2024, tourism contributed \$50.8 billion to Canada's GDP. For British Columbia in 2023, the most recent statistics available, the visitor economy generated almost \$10 billion for the provincial GDP.

More recent StatCan data shows that B.C.'s tourism sector has seen year-over-year declines in U.S. resident travel to Canada through to 2025. Yes, despite this softer U.S. demand, overseas visitation has increased, as has the number of Canadians travelling domestically. These factors have contributed to B.C.'s growing tourism sector. This highlights the need to continue promoting Canada internationally so that we can further expand our tourism source markets.

Colleagues, tourism receipts show that the industry in B.C. alone generates approximately \$2.5 billion in provincial and municipal tax revenue and an estimated \$2.5 billion to \$3.5 billion in federal tax revenue.

[*Translation*]

Beyond the revenue it generates, British Columbia illustrates the value of building the country through tourism, since its growth is both inclusive and regional.

According to the British Columbia tourism industry, more than 95% of our tourism business operators are small and medium-sized enterprises spread across every riding in the province. This means that, in British Columbia, the economic benefits are widely distributed and support rural, coastal, mountain and remote communities.

Revenue generated by British Columbia's tourism sector also bolsters the vitality of communities by supporting local infrastructure, cultural events and recreational facilities throughout the year.

[*English*]

The Tourism Industry Association of BC indicates that tourism demand has driven significant investment in airports, highways, ferries, ports, convention facilities, trails, parks and public spaces. These assets, which ultimately serve residents first and visitors second, further support trade, workforce mobility, emergency response and community livability.

Finally, colleagues, I cannot speak about tourism in my home province without mentioning the Indigenous tourism industry. One of the most important things to know about British Columbia is that First Nations communities are at the heart of the province's culture and history.

Our province is home to 204 First Nations and more than 400 Indigenous tourism-related businesses. These businesses cover everything from art galleries and cultural centres to wildlife tours and wellness retreats, all offering an authentic experience found nowhere else in the world. These types of Indigenous-owned and -operated experiences are not only an awesome pathway to reconciliation but also an important step towards economic self-determination through own-source revenue.

Honourable senators, I grew up in B.C., and I can attest it is really unlike anywhere else. I speak for all my B.C. colleagues, I know, when I say: Come and see for yourself. Take a wine tour through the Okanagan; explore the cool vibe of the Kootenays and get lost among the many mountains and lakes; explore the desolate beauty of B.C.'s north or the ghost towns of the gold rush; stay at a fishing lodge on one of our many spectacular coasts; roam the beaches of Vancouver Island; ski the many exceptional resorts; enjoy Canada's second-largest pride festival; or experience the world-class dining of Vancouver before boarding a ship up the magnificent Inside Passage. And, sure, you can come for the FIFA World Cup too.

Tourism in my province does not simply provide a bottom-line revenue number; it creates jobs, sustains families, enriches and shares cultures, supports countless related sectors and physically builds the province through investments in infrastructure, public spaces and service provision. In the face of external uncertainties, the tourism sector is an engine that allows B.C. to continue to grow.

Colleagues, we can all sense that Canada is increasingly being seen as a cool place to visit. With the Prime Minister's speech in Davos, topped off with a touch of gay hockey romance on Crave, Canada is no longer just cool; it's hot. Let's leverage that hotness and invite the world to come for a visit.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

(On motion of Senator White, debate adjourned.)

**BUSINESS OF THE SENATE**

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

That the Senate do now adjourn.

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

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

*(At 3:29 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.)*

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