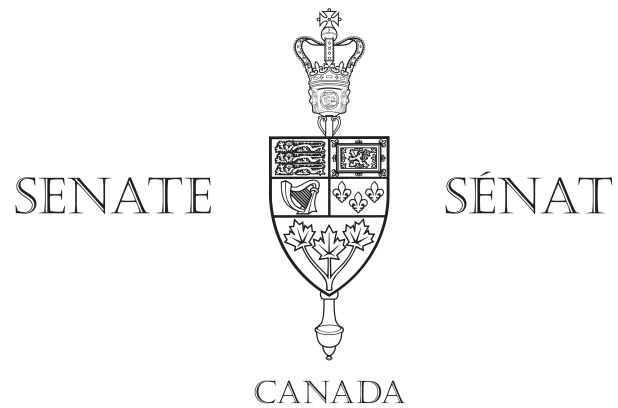




DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION



45th PARLIAMENT



VOLUME 154



NUMBER 91

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

The Honourable RAYMONDE GAGNÉ,
Speaker

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Publications Centre: Publications@sen.parl.gc.ca

Published by the Senate
Available on the Internet: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

THE SENATE

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

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

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

ANNIVERSARY OF OCTOBER 7 ATTACK ON ISRAEL

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, October 7, 2023, was the deadliest single-day massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. On that day, Hamas terrorists invaded Israel and slaughtered innocent people. They filmed their crimes and published videos for the world to see.

One of the most lasting images of their sick glee was the video of them parading the mutilated body of Shani Louk through the streets of Gaza on the back of a pickup truck.

Another woman's mutilated body was filmed being pulled out from the trunk of a vehicle, her pants soaked with blood.

The testimony is no less harrowing. One woman described watching her friend gang-raped and her breasts cut off, then shot in the head while her attacker was still raping her.

Israeli first responders found young women, some in their early teens, without pants and with evidence of rape on their bodies. Others had broken pelvises, so violent was the assault. Rape was used as a weapon, honourable colleagues. That is something that should infuriate everyone in this chamber who has ever spoken out about violence against women.

They killed eight Canadians: Judih Weinstein Haggai, Vivian Silver, Ben Mizrachi, Alexandre Look, Tiferet Lapidot, Shir Georgy, Netta Epstein and Adi Vital-Kaploun. Adi was shot in her home in front of her two small sons. Her mother, Jacqui, born and raised in Ottawa, was visiting family in this city when she learned that her daughter was dead. Having sat across from Jacqui, the sheer weight of her loss is impossible for me to forget.

Honourable senators, it is frankly infuriating that, three years later, I'm still standing here in this Parliament having to explain what happened on October 7.

It was not simply the opening chapter of a war, as CTV shamefully reported this morning before taking it down from their website.

It was not an act of resistance nor an abstract conflict to be sanitized, reframed or glossed over by headlines. It was a targeted, horrific massacre of Jewish people, and every single event, every drop of blood and all the destruction across the region stems squarely from what Hamas did that particular morning.

That hate has spilled over into every part of the world, including right here in our streets, where Jewish people are the number one target of crimes despite making up only 1% of our population.

Mere weeks ago, a synagogue here in Belleville was shot on Yom Kippur. Today, synagogues and schools require police protection. Jewish families are actively asking whether their children have a future in this country, and many have decided they do not.

To ignore where this hatred originated, to indulge in moral equivalency or to forget the unspeakable savagery of October 7 is a complete betrayal of its victims, Jewish Canadians and our Western principles.

"Never again" cannot be a passive phrase reserved for history books; it demands unequivocal moral clarity today and every day. We must call evil by its name, stand unyielding with Jewish communities here at home and around the world and honour the memory of every victim stolen from us on that dark day.

Thank you, honourable colleagues.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

THE LATE HEIDI MARSHALL

Hon. Judy A. White: Honourable senators, I rise today with a heavy heart to pay tribute to Heidi Marshall, a proud Mi'kmaq woman, respected educator, advocate, Knowledge Keeper and, for me, a dear friend.

I met Heidi at Dalhousie Law School. In fact, it was our colleague and friend Senator Prosper who introduced us. When I look back on those years, I remember someone impossible to miss. Heidi carried herself with confidence, determination and an unwavering pride in her Mi'kmaq identity. Even then, she knew who she was and what she was called to do.

While many of us were simply trying to survive law school, Heidi was already thinking about how she could use her education to help others. She understood that success meant little unless it created opportunities for her people, her community and future generations.

What I admired most about Heidi was that, no matter how accomplished she became, she never lost sight of people. She had a remarkable ability to make others feel seen, heard and valued. She led with kindness, believed in lifting others up and celebrated their gifts as much as her own.

One of the clearest examples of that was the Finding Our Identity fashion show, a vision that Heidi brought to life. She understood that fashion was about far more than clothing; it was about identity, culture, resilience and pride. Through that event, she created opportunities for Mi'kmaq artists and designers to showcase their talents and for young Indigenous people to see themselves reflected in strength, beauty and possibility. It was Heidi at her finest, creating opportunities and celebrating culture.

Today, however, I do not want to speak only about Heidi's accomplishments. I want to remember her warmth, laughter — and, wow, there was laughter — wisdom and generosity. I want to remember a woman who loved deeply and cared fiercely. Heidi's greatest joy was her family. She treasured her children, her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren and her chosen children.

Speaking about them brought her immense happiness, and that joy was evident to everyone around her. They were the centre of her world and will always be the living legacy of her love, strength and devotion.

Her life touched countless people: students, colleagues, community members, artists, leaders, friends and family. We all carry a piece of Heidi's influence with us.

To Heidi's family, I extend my deepest condolences and sincere gratitude for sharing her with all of us. We grieve alongside you, but we also celebrate a life rich in purpose, service and love.

Heidi, you did it. You left behind a legacy that will continue to inspire generations of Mi'kmaq people and all those fortunate enough to have known you. May you rest in peace.

Wela'liog. Thank you.

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 researchers and scientists from Research New Brunswick. They are the guests of honourable senators from New Brunswick.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

ATLANTIC CANCER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Hon. Victor Boudreau: Honourable senators, today I'm pleased to draw your attention to an organization that is making an outstanding contribution to the fight against cancer. The Atlantic Cancer Research Institute, or ACRI, was founded in 1998 by Dr. Rodney Ouellette, a medical researcher who studied at the Université de Moncton and the Université Laval.

• (1410)

The Honourable Dr. Ouellette, who now sits alongside us in this chamber, was among the early contributors to liquid biopsy research in Canada, and his work helped advance precision oncology across the country. In 2025, he was appointed to the Order of New Brunswick in recognition of his contributions.

[English]

With a research team of more than 50 scientists, the Atlantic Cancer Research Institute, or ACRI, has become a true centre of excellence, not just in New Brunswick but on the global stage of cancer research.

Colleagues, ACRI's scientists are not simply studying cancer; they are inventing the tools to detect and fight it. Their innovations are opening new doors for early, minimally invasive cancer detection, the kind of breakthroughs that can mean the difference between catching a cancer early and catching it too late.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, cancer remains one of the most pressing challenges of our time, and it is researchers like those at ACRI, working with partners across Canada and around the world, who will develop breakthrough solutions.

ACRI has recently evolved in other ways by creating the New Brunswick Health Research Institute, to encompass other key areas of health research. This collaborative health research institute will further enhance New Brunswick's ability to develop talent and advance knowledge in order to have a positive impact on the health of our population.

I commend Senator Ouellette and the entire team at the Atlantic Cancer Research Institute for their dedication to this critical work.

If you would like to learn more about the work of ACRI or the countless other innovative researchers across New Brunswick, I invite you to attend the New Brunswick Research and Innovation Showcase this evening starting at 5:30 p.m. in room 310 at 180 Wellington Street. I hope to see you there.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[English]

INNOVATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

Hon. Krista Ross: Honourable senators, you have already heard some of our colleagues — Senators Kingston, Ringuette and Boudreau — speak about the New Brunswick Research and Innovation Showcase and organizations in our province that are leading the way. There will be more statements in the days to come.

Today, I rise to recognize two New Brunswick innovators, Anessa and the Institute of Biomedical Engineering, or IBME, at the University of New Brunswick, or UNB, whose work reminds us why our province has earned its reputation as Canada's innovation sandbox.

Since 2015, Fredericton-based Anessa has been building software that helps energy companies and project developers evaluate, optimize and monitor renewable natural gas opportunities.

Using AI-powered modelling and digital twin technology, Anessa gives policy-makers — as well as industry players — the tools to design biogas projects that are not only environmentally sound but economically viable, turning organic waste into clean energy and strengthening our energy resilience. It is a solution made in New Brunswick, helping companies to move toward a more circular, decarbonized economy, both domestically and internationally.

Down the road, UNB's Institute of Biomedical Engineering has spent 60 years proving that world-class research and hands-on clinical care belong in the same building.

Founded in 1965 by Dr. Robert Scott, IBME has trained generations of students who go on to lead in research and industry, while its Atlantic Clinic for Upper Limb Prosthetics continues to change lives across our region with custom-fitted myoelectric devices. This is the kind of institution that can only exist where deep expertise, community need and a spirit of experimentation come together.

Honourable senators, these two organizations look different on paper: One is a young software company, and the other is a decades-old research institute. However, they share the same foundation, skills, talent and willingness to try new things that make New Brunswick a place where innovation is not just welcomed but expected.

Colleagues, as you have heard, this evening at 5:30, in Room 310 in the Wellington Building, Research New Brunswick is hosting their Research and Innovation Showcase, bringing New Brunswick researchers and innovators to Ottawa. I am proud to co-host this event alongside Senator Boudreau. We hope to see you there.

Thank you, *wela'lin*.

CANADIAN RIVERS INSTITUTE

Hon. John M. McNair: Honourable senators, I am proud to rise today to recognize the Canadian Rivers Institute, or CRI, hosted at the University of New Brunswick, and its ongoing work to understand, protect and restore the health of our waterways.

Founded in 2001 as a small collaboration between UNB researchers in Fredericton and Saint John, CRI has grown into a network of hundreds of scientists, graduate students and staff spanning 17 institutions across Canada and abroad. Its mission is ambitious but simple to state: to make every river a healthy river.

That work is more than academic. CRI researchers in New Brunswick are producing the science that governments and industry rely on to make real decisions, including designing a large transboundary river monitoring program for the Government of the Northwest Territories and for the Government of Alberta; assessing the state of New Brunswick rivers for the federal government to identify priority management areas; and providing cutting-edge ecological genomics services through the CRI Genomics lab in Saint John, New Brunswick.

Its New Brunswick Aquatic Ecosystem Study examining the Wolastoq, also known as the Saint John River, is the first study of its kind and scale anywhere in the world, informing the future of hydro power and fish passage on one of our province's most important waterways.

I would also note that CRI's science has helped underpin something quite remarkable: the return of Atlantic salmon to rivers where they had not spawned in over a decade.

Working alongside Fort Folly First Nation and Parks Canada in Fundy National Park, researchers helped develop a world-first approach, raising juvenile salmon in ocean pens before release, that is now bringing adult salmon back to spawn.

This past year, that initiative, which is known as Respectful Returns, was named a UN World Restoration Flagship, the only Canadian project to earn this distinction and one of the most significant environmental honours ever bestowed on Canadian work.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator McNair: Colleagues, being cognizant of my time, I'll continue.

This is science made in New Brunswick, built on 25 years of research and partnership and delivering results recognized around the world. It is a clear example of why our province continues to be Canada's innovation sandbox, where researchers, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and communities work side by side to solve problems that matter.

Meegwetch, 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 Yul Kim, President, and other representatives from CDI College of Business, Technology and Healthcare. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Martin.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

CDI COLLEGE

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to recognize CDI College for its enduring commitment to providing career-focused post-secondary education and training to students across Canada since 1969.

For nearly six decades, CDI College has opened doors for countless individuals, offering practical training in essential fields, including health care, early childhood education, dental care, information technology, cybersecurity, business, legal studies, skilled trades, community services, hospitality and design. Today, its network of 36 campuses spans British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, acting as vital local hubs of opportunity and economic mobility.

Honourable senators, Canada faces an economic reality that demands our full attention. We are confronting profound labour shortages across critical sectors from coast to coast to coast. Our hospitals and long-term care facilities face severe demands for health care professionals.

Our communities urgently need early childhood educators to support families and workforce participation. Our evolving digital and corporate landscapes require skilled workers in cybersecurity, network administration and business.

• (1420)

CDI College hits these challenges head-on. By providing market-driven, accelerated programs with hands-on training in industry-standard labs and mandatory practicum placements, CDI College bridges the divide between eager learners and employers desperate to hire. Students at CDI College do not just learn theory; they gain real-world experience, ensuring they step into the workforce ready to contribute from day one.

Behind this vital work is the strong foundation built by generations of students, graduates, expert instructors and staff at CDI College. I want to express my sincere regard for the chairman, Dr. Peter Chung, and his visionary leadership, as well as the substantial investments Primacorp Ventures is making in Canadian education. Through CDI College campuses and other educational institutions they support, their leadership ensures that private career education remains agile, modern and deeply responsive to Canada's economic needs.

I also want to acknowledge Yul Kim, president of Primacorp's education division, along with his dedicated team, whose tireless operational efforts and commitment to educational excellence turn that vision into a daily reality.

Honourable senators, please join me in applauding their invaluable contributions to our communities and to Canada's economic future. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of political representatives from South America, Indigenous leaders from the Amazon, Indigenous leaders from Canada and Ms. Stephanie Boyd, director of the documentary *Karuara*. They are the guests of the Honourable Senator Galvez.

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

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[English]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

BUDGET 2025 IMPLEMENTATION BILL, NO. 2

FIFTH REPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER TABLED

Hon. Paulette Senior: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, which deals with the subject matter of those elements contained in Division 10 of Part 4 of Bill C-31, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

(Pursuant to the order adopted June 10, 2026, the report was deemed referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[Translation]

FINAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT FOR THE TLEGHOLI GOT'INE BILL

EIGHTH REPORT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. Michèle Audette, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, presented the following report:

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

The Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples has the honour to present its

EIGHTH REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred Bill C-27, An Act to give effect to the Final Self-Government Agreement for the Tlegohli Got'ine and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, has, in obedience to the order of reference of Monday, September 28, 2026, examined the said bill and now reports the same without amendment but with certain observations, which are appended to this report.

Respectfully submitted,

MICHÈLE AUDETTE

Chair

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

(On motion of Senator Duncan, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting of the Senate.)

BUDGET 2025 IMPLEMENTATION BILL, NO. 2

SEVENTH REPORT OF BANKING, COMMERCE AND THE
ECONOMY COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER TABLED

Hon. Clément Gignac: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and the Economy, which deals with the subject matter of those elements contained in Divisions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 of Part 4 of Bill C-31, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

(Pursuant to the order adopted June 10, 2026, the report was deemed referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[English]

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, October 20, 2026, at 2 p.m.

[Translation]

CUTTING RED TAPE FOR ALL CANADIANS BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Pierre Moreau (Government Representative in the Senate) introduced Bill S-7, An Act to modernize certain regulatory and administrative processes.

(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]

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

WESTMINSTER SEMINAR ON EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTS,
MARCH 9-13, 2026—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rosemary Moodie: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association concerning the Seventy-fourth Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments, held in London, United Kingdom, from March 9 to 13, 2026.

JOINT PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE OF BELIZE CAPACITY-
BUILDING WORKSHOP, JULY 27-29, 2026—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rosemary Moodie: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association concerning the Joint Public Accounts Committee of Belize Capacity-Building Workshop, held in Belmopan, Belize, from July 27 to 29, 2026.

BILATERAL VISIT TO MOZAMBIQUE AND BOTSWANA,
MARCH 15-21, 2026—REPORT TABLED

Hon. Rosemary Moodie: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association concerning the Bilateral Visit to Mozambique and Botswana, held in Maputo, Mozambique, and Gaborone, Botswana, from March 15 to 21, 2026.

The delegation wishes to express its deepest appreciation to the officials of Global Affairs Canada and to the staff of Canada's missions in both countries for their exceptional support and hospitality throughout this visit. The delegation is particularly grateful to His Excellency Anderson Blanc, High Commissioner of Canada to Mozambique, and His Excellency Adler Aristilde, High Commissioner of Canada to Botswana. Their insight, guidance and commitment were instrumental in ensuring the success of this mission. Thank you.

• (1430)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it is now 2:30 p.m.

I will now ask the minister to enter and take her seat.

QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on June 4, 2025, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, today we have with us for Question Period the Honourable Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, to respond to questions concerning her ministerial responsibilities.

On behalf of all senators, I welcome the minister.

I would like to inform you that a main question is limited to one minute and your response to one minute thirty seconds. The question and answer for a supplementary question are both limited to 45 seconds. The reading clerk stands 10 seconds before these times expire. I ask everyone to respect these times. Question Period will last 64 minutes.

**MINISTRY OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Minister, welcome to the Senate. As you know, Canada has recently experienced some of the most destructive wildfire seasons on record, requiring constant operational readiness. However, under your government's expenditure review, roughly half the positions at the Government Operations Centre have been eliminated, satellite mapping staff received layoff notices this summer and the weather radar team was completely disbanded.

How can the government possibly justify gutting federal emergency coordination capacity and disaster intelligence after some of the worst wildfire seasons on record?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you for the question. It was, indeed, a very difficult wildfire season.

With respect to the Government Operations Centre, it is fully operational 24-7. It offers support before, during and after emergency situations. There are, at present, 100-plus full-time staff. There is also the ability for us to bring other cross-trained government personnel to the Government Operations Centre when we need extra people. That includes for things such as the G7 and FIFA, where additional situational awareness staff were required.

The information that you have with respect to the layoffs is not the same information I have. It is my understanding that it was back office staff and redundant staff and that we are operating with approximately 10 fewer people.

Senator Housakos: Minister, regardless of where the staff was, they are no longer available. They are not being deployed in the back office, front office or out in the field, taking care of what is clearly becoming a major crisis. Emergency readiness is not fiscal discipline, nor should public safety management get in the way of this important issue.

What explicit commitments can you give Canadians and the Senate today that your government will prioritize national readiness and implement practical, common-sense fire prevention before the next wildfire season? Clearly, after the experience we had this year, we need more of everything — not less of anything — when it comes to dealing with these terrible wildfires that are afflicting this country from coast to coast.

Ms. Olszewski: I assure you, senator, that, with respect to the Government Operations Centre, it is — as I indicated — fully staffed by permanent personnel. We know that the safety and well-being of Canadians are of the utmost concern during times of national emergency, and nothing that we have done will remove our commitment to those objectives. Thank you.

LITHIUM-ION BATTERY FIRES

[English]

Hon. David M. Wells: Minister, welcome to the Senate. Last week, in your Fire Prevention Week statement, you mentioned the risks associated with lithium-ion batteries. Thank you for that statement. It is important to firefighters across the country. I have met with hundreds of them, and in September — just last month — I wrote to the government calling for a national database to track lithium-ion battery fires. Canada currently has no comprehensive national system to collect this information. Without reliable data, it is difficult to identify trends, understand the risks to first responders and develop effective prevention and response measures. Firefighters are specifically calling for this measure, as it will save lives.

Minister, will your government commit to establishing a national database for lithium-ion battery fire incidents?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you for the question, senator. I too have met with fire chiefs and firefighters over the past 16 months, and I know how concerning this issue is to them. What is happening at present is that matter, lithium batteries, has been referred to the health minister. She will come forward with some recommendations. Then, based on what she says, we will determine what further steps we need to take at this time.

Senator D. M. Wells: Thank you, minister. I urge you to support that.

AIRPORT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Hon. David M. Wells: Minister, I also wrote to the government about emergency preparedness at Canada's airports. Airport firefighting is highly specialized, but major incidents may require assistance from municipal fire departments whose personnel may not have the same specialized training.

Will your government work with airports and fire services to strengthen cross-training and coordination so all responding firefighters are properly prepared for a major airport emergency?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Senator, that is something that is top of mind for emergency management, and that is making sure we have appropriately trained firefighters in place, including at airports. That is especially a consideration, as well, in terms of interface fires because we know that we didn't used to have to worry about fires that impacted communities. So we had separate wildfire firefighters and separate structural firefighters. That is another area where coordination between firefighting personnel is fundamentally important. So, yes, we are committed to making sure there is cooperation and, more importantly, collaboration in terms of firefighting —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Hon. Kim Pate: Welcome, minister. As Canada grapples with increasing environmental crises, particularly — as we've heard — with respect to forest fires, this past summer we saw Namaygoosisagagun First Nation and Whitewater Lake First Nation in northern Ontario burn to the ground. Grand Council Chief of the Anishinabek Nation, Linda Debassige, confirmed that the First Nation was left to self-evacuate without government support and after the federal government had assured the community there was no imminent threat. She noted:

If this community waited for a mandatory evacuation process, we'd be doing a recovery mission for the bodies of children, of elders, of men and women.

Across Canada, 80% of Indigenous communities are located in areas at higher risk of fire. What proactive steps is the government taking to ensure that communities already experiencing systemic inequality are not abandoned to the most devastating impacts of —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, senator.

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you for the question. In terms of that particular situation, Ontario would have first been responsible for the coordination of suppression and evacuation attempts. The federal government's capacity is exercised when there is an RFA, so a formal request for federal assistance. In the case of the Province of Ontario, a formal request was made a few days after, and it was to evacuate a First Nation that was suffering from the effects of smoke. So I approved that formal request and called in the Armed Forces so that we could evacuate a different community.

• (1440)

Just to the question more broadly, we know that First Nations disproportionately suffer the effects of climate change, and we know that rural and Indigenous communities face some of the most difficult challenges, not only with respect to suppression in their communities in terms of equipment and firefighters, but also in terms of evacuation.

In terms of evacuations, one of the things that I am looking at, and will be moving forward with, is adding a couple of First Nations agencies to our humanitarian workforce. So there will be —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Hon. Kim Pate: Clearly, there was a lack of communication in that particular case. I hope that has been remedied. The government has also committed to implementing the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, including a national guaranteed livable income. What steps has your department taken to explore the potential highlighted by experts, including former governor of the Bank of Canada Stephen Poloz, for such income support programs to serve as a facet of crisis response, helping Canadian communities and economies weather emergencies, including by ensuring that all — especially those who are most marginalized — can meet their essential needs and keep themselves safe?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Senator, that's not something that we have been studying at this particular point in time. That said, support for Indigenous communities in particular is provided through the Emergency Management Assistance Program, or EMAP, for First Nations people on-reserve. Through that program, reimbursement is provided in terms of businesses and individuals impacted by natural disasters.

NATIONAL PUBLIC ALERTING SYSTEM

Hon. René Cormier: Welcome, minister. Last April, our colleague Senator Allister Surette reminded the Minister of Public Safety that the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has, for several years, been calling for a clear requirement that emergency alerts be issued simultaneously and with equal quality in both official languages.

Yet, the federal directive still provides for bilingual alerts only where possible. As part of the renewal of the National Public Alerting System, are you prepared to establish a clear obligation to issue emergency alerts simultaneously in French and English? If so, when?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you for the question, senator. In terms of the National Public Alerting System, that is a system that's currently being modernized. So, in the interim period, until we have the new system in place, I can assure Canadians that the old system will continue to operate.

The federal government provides this system, and it's up to individual provinces and territories to decide what kind of alert, in which language, how long the alert will be available and the wording of the alert. That said, the question of the alert being issued in different languages is a fundamentally important one. As we go through the modernization process, I can commit to the fact that we are looking at incorporating not just the French language but Indigenous languages as well in the public alerting system. Thank you.

[Translation]

MINORITY LANGUAGE SERVICES

Hon. René Cormier: Minister, the new Official Languages Act states that the government's language obligations apply at all times, including during emergencies. How does your department intend to put this principle into practice when modernizing the National Public Alerting System, so that no francophone living in a linguistic minority setting is forced to choose between their safety and their language?

[English]

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: I agree with you, senator. As I've indicated, that is something that our department is looking at as we go through the steps to modernize the National Public Alerting System. Thank you.

PRAIRIES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Tracy Muggli: Minister, thank you for being with us today. I would like to ask a question in relation to your role as the minister responsible for PrairiesCan — to change the subject a little bit.

The Regional Tariff Response Initiative intake for applications has recently opened to help support businesses facing the impact of tariffs, including changes to their customer markets and supply chains. Can you share how PrairiesCan intends to ensure that this funding actually reaches affected Prairie businesses quickly enough to make a difference? What is the expected timeline for reviewing applications and getting funding out the door?

For businesses that do receive funding, what indicators will be collected to measure whether this initiative is actually working, such as identifying if businesses were able to maintain jobs, diversify or become more resilient to current and future trade disruptions?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you for the question. I think the government made a very wise decision having tariff relief — at least some portions of it — dealt with through regional development agencies such as PrairiesCan.

PrairiesCan is nimble. It is very much aware of businesses across the Prairie provinces. It has a very strong presence on the ground. Of course, we want to get to as many small- and medium-sized tariff-impacted businesses as possible.

Since tariff relief came into being, which was March 2025, PrairiesCan has approved more than \$450 million for over 300 projects. The investments have supported 9,400 businesses across the Prairies alone and contributed to the creation of more than 15,000 jobs. That is an incredible success story. With this recent round of tariffs, we've added a liquidity measure.

To your question about timing, it used to take a number of weeks, and sometimes a couple of months, to process requests that went to PrairiesCan. In terms of tariff relief, liquidity measures are being done in under a week. The other types, like support for businesses that want to pivot, are being done expeditiously as well. Thank you.

Senator Muggli: As a follow-up, what is PrairiesCan doing to help businesses, municipalities and NGOs become aware of programs to help adapt to the current environment and assist them in applying for the proper programs for which they may qualify?

Ms. Olszewski: That's a really important question because we need to get to as many small- and medium-sized enterprises as possible. Not only through PrairiesCan but through my office, we are engaging with chambers of commerce and various business groups across the Prairies. We are holding round tables and making sure we have literature available so that as many businesses as possible are aware of the tariff relief that's available.

The other thing we've done — and I think this is important, too — is that we have created a one-stop window. Someone may contact PrairiesCan first, but PrairiesCan may not have the right type of tariff relief. A bigger company may need help through a different strategic —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[English]

ALERTING SYSTEM FOR SENIORS

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Welcome, minister. By the year 2030, nearly 1 million Canadians will be living with dementia. Up to 60% of them will wander away and go missing at some point. If they are not found within the first 12 hours, the risk of a fatal outcome climbs to 50%.

Despite having an emergency broadcast infrastructure used for weather warnings and AMBER Alerts, Canada does not have a standardized alert system for missing persons with dementia. Canada does have a fragmented patchwork of differing provincial and territorial risk criteria, alert thresholds, privacy guidelines and data standards.

Minister, how are you working with your provincial and territorial counterparts to collaboratively leverage Canada's existing alerting infrastructure to better protect missing persons with dementia?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you for the question. I would just like to start by saying that my heart goes out to all who have lost someone suffering with dementia on account of a situation such as the one you've described. We know there was a situation in Calgary as well where a young boy with autism suffered a very terrible fate.

[Ms. Olszewski]

In terms of the alerting system, as I've indicated, it's really up to provinces and territories to decide how those alerts will work. Some provinces are instituting what they call an Indigo Alert and also Silver Alerts for seniors.

I have regular meetings with my provincial and territorial counterparts. The next in-person meeting is in November in Edmonton. If we need a national strategy, provinces and territories would need to cooperate with me on that. That is on our agenda for that meeting. Thank you.

• (1450)

Senator Osler: Thank you, minister. I'm glad to hear it is on the agenda.

The federal government has built the Alert Ready infrastructure. Yet, today, if a police detachment in one province issues an alert, it cannot seamlessly talk to a detachment across the border because it would need a different data standard and system architecture. However, if the federal government were to provide a unified technical template, provinces could voluntarily opt in without risking a jurisdictional battle. Public Safety Canada already houses the National Public Alerting System's data-sharing files. Minister, what is legally or operationally stopping your department from designing a single, national data blueprint for senior alerts?

Ms. Olszewski: Thank you for the question, senator. I am not 100% familiar with the technical requirements for that sort of data reporting system, but what I can stress is that, as we modernize that alerting system, we will try to fix, update and upgrade as many aspects of that system as possible because we know how important it is to the safety and security of Canadians. Thank you.

FLOOD PREVENTION

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Hello, minister. The Sumas Prairie in my province of British Columbia has been at the centre of devastating floods for decades, the most recent being in 2025. The core issue, as I understand it and as you know, is south of the Sumas border in the Nooksack River in Washington state, which presents a serious transboundary flood risk to communities in the Fraser Valley. Although British Columbia and Washington have increased cooperation since 2021 through the Nooksack and Sumas Watershed Transboundary Flood Initiative, international relations are fundamentally a federal responsibility.

My question, minister, is: What concrete action have you taken with your counterpart in the United States to reduce this cross-border threat to Canadians, which we know will happen in the next flood?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Senator, thank you very much for the question. I can tell you that both my parliamentary secretary and I have travelled to the Fraser Valley region. We actually joined the Sumas Prairie Watershed Table and had discussions with leadership. At this point in time, it has been under British Columbia's leadership, including First Nations leadership. We understand the situation with respect to the Nooksack River and our neighbours to the south. As we continue to work through the issues as partners at that table, we will certainly endeavour to address the flooding issues that arise because of what happens south of the border. We are committed to that.

I should add that the federal government has also committed the sum of \$20 million at this point in time to help the people designing the mitigation for that area to do some early studies and engineering work. We are committed to working with the Sumas Prairie Watershed Table in that regard. I appreciate that this is a fundamentally important region of the country for so many reasons.

Senator Martin: As we approach a super El Niño weather event, Canadians living downstream of the Nooksack River should not have to wonder which government is responsible as another flood approaches. I know you said that you were at the Sumas Prairie Watershed Table, but my question is: Have you secured specific commitments from American authorities to reduce the Nooksack River flood risk? That's where it is coming from.

Ms. Olszewski: I'm sorry, senator. I do understand that. At the present time, I have not personally had discussions with any American officials, nor has my parliamentary secretary. It is my understanding, though, from being part of that table, that there are already discussions taking place between British Columbia and the United States.

Senator Martin: Minister, in the same vein, British Columbians are being warned the super El Niño phenomenon could intensify a giant underwater wave of water, commonly called a Kelvin wave, which can raise water levels by more than 30 centimetres. Communities in B.C. are, unfortunately, painfully aware of how quickly extreme weather events can turn into emergencies, and I have witnessed it. I know people who live in the valley. You are at the table, so can you explain the specific steps you are taking now to ensure federal resources are available to British Columbia if it will require assistance? Have you made certain commitments? What have you discussed at the Sumas Prairie Watershed Table?

Ms. Olszewski: The commitment at this point in time is the sum of \$20 million to help British Columbia deal with mitigating flood risk. As I have indicated, that would include engineering and various studies. That will not be the end of it because we have committed to working with that table. We have signed a memorandum of understanding, and we will be there for the people of British Columbia in that area.

Senator Martin: Thank you for having been there. I have a comment on something specific. In California, which is already feeling the effects of the Kelvin wave, authorities are already

placing emergency sand on beaches in an effort to deter rising water. Minister, what is your department doing ahead of the arrival of these waves to mitigate the flood risks in B.C.? I know there's the B.C. government and the group working on the ground. Are there specific things the federal government has also put in place?

Ms. Olszewski: To my knowledge, senator, there are not at this time. That does not mean there will not be. I can tell you, at least based on what I know, that was not the nature of the discussions the last time we were at the Sumas Prairie Watershed Table. I appreciate the concerns that you are raising with me, and I will raise them with my department. I commit to you to do that. Thank you.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Thank you, minister, for joining us today. Welcome to the Senate.

In reviewing Public Safety Canada's 2026-27 Departmental Plan, I noted that emergency management remains one of the department's core responsibilities. Table 7 outlines several indicators measuring Canada's ability to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters.

Minister, what is Public Safety Canada doing to strengthen public preparedness and encourage Canadians to take practical steps to reduce their disaster risk? Are there any specific awareness initiatives that have been successful so far or show potential for success in trying to influence Canadians' behaviours?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Senator, you raise a really important issue because we know most Canadians are not prepared for any kind of natural disaster. They are not adequately prepared for flooding, wildfires or evacuations.

Through my department, which is part of Public Safety Canada, we have endeavoured to educate the public. During Emergency Preparedness Week, we have a full-on campaign to educate members of the public on our website. We have relevant information. We do have plans, as we move forward, to strengthen federal emergency management by having a part of our department that would deal with helping Canadians get ready for all types of natural disasters because, as you have indicated, it is a fundamentally important issue.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that, minister.

Your department reports that while 92% of Canadians say they are aware of the risks facing their households, only 30% have taken concrete preparedness measures, well below the department's target of 50%. That's your target. Results have been hovering around 30% for the past three years.

How is the government addressing this gap between awareness and action, and what work is being done to better understand why Canadians are not taking the steps needed to prepare for emergencies? Your report does recognize that further research and analysis are needed to better understand this discrepancy.

Ms. Olszewski: Senator, as I have indicated, we know this is an area where we need to do more work. I know that members of the public are not well prepared for emergencies. We see that every wildfire season. We see people being concerned about wildfires when they are happening, and as soon as the wildfire season is over, people seem to forget and don't take adequate steps to prepare for the next season.

• (1500)

From a public education perspective, this is something that we know we need to focus on, and we know that we need to get the numbers that you have quoted to a better place. We are endeavouring to do that. It's fundamentally important.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Hon. Paula Simons: Late last month, you met with Premier Danielle Smith to announce plans to move toward developing high-speed rail between Edmonton and Calgary. The province has gone so far as to say that they want to have a request for proposal, or RFP, awarded by the spring of 2027.

I want to better understand the federal government's role in this. You're going to fast-track it to the Major Projects Office, but is the federal government going to commit funds to the building of this? What exactly is the role of your government in getting this built?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you for the question, senator.

At this point in time, based on what I have been advised by the premier, there are companies that want to invest in this project. She indicated in our announcement that there would be no requirement for provincial or federal funding. She indicated that a number of corporations had stepped up to the plate and would be responding to the RFP. At least at this present time, that's what the status is.

Senator Simons: I'm curious about this because it would certainly be simpler and faster to build a high-speed rail line between Edmonton and Calgary. They don't have the population nodes that Toronto and Montreal do, yet the federal government seems to be quite generously supporting the development of high-speed rail in Eastern Central Canada but not for the potential Alberta link, which could be a much faster build with huge economic and environmental upsides.

Is the federal government willing to do more than direct this to the Major Projects Office?

[Senator Loffreda]

Ms. Olszewski: At the present time, our role is to work together with Alberta in order to advance that project. As I've indicated, I guess we'll have to wait and see what happens in terms of responses received to the RFP.

At the present time, based on what the premier has said, it certainly appears as though there will be private money invested in that high-speed rail line, and that's the situation at this point in time.

Senator Simons: Thank you.

[Translation]

RESERVE FORCE

Hon. Danièle Henkel: Good afternoon, Minister Olszewski.

As honorary lieutenant-colonel of the Régiment de Maisonneuve, a reserve regiment, I am particularly sensitive to the role that reservists play in supporting civilian authorities during natural disasters.

The 2024-25 departmental report of the Department of National Defence states that reserve force operations in response to natural disasters have been steadily and exponentially increasing since 2010.

Your department is currently working to strengthen civilian disaster response capacity. Could you please tell me how you plan to reduce the growing pressure on the reserve force and ensure that it remains a supplementary force rather than a force that is being increasingly called upon systematically?

[English]

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Senator, you've raised an important issue. We know that our Canadian Armed Forces personnel respond to disasters the moment we ask them to do so, and they do so fearlessly. They're welcomed each time they arrive in a community that's undergoing a disaster-type situation.

We also know, though, that we shouldn't be using our Armed Forces personnel to do things like type 3 firefighting, which is basically poking debris to make sure that there aren't any ashes that can ignite a further fire.

One of the things we've been doing is we have something we call the Humanitarian Workforce Program. It was put in place during COVID, but we use it now, and we support it financially. It includes agencies like the Canadian Red Cross, Team Rubicon Canada, the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada, St. John Ambulance and the Salvation Army.

There are people, particularly in the Canadian Red Cross and Team Rubicon Canada, as well as the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada, who are trained to do that kind of work. You will have noted from the flooding that happened in Manitoba this year that we used, in fact, Team Rubicon Canada

and Canadian Red Cross personnel to assist us. There was only a small group of Canadian Armed Forces logistics personnel who were called to respond to that.

We are endeavouring to strengthen our civilian response when we can do so in the near to medium future.

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Senator Henkel: Minister, based on the answer you just provided, I'd like to highlight the fact that, yes, your department is working with National Defence to ensure that our reserve units receive the training and equipment they need and that they engage in joint exercises with public safety authorities to respond to natural disasters, which are happening more and more.

Is your department working to make sure they are adequately equipped?

[English]

Ms. Olszewski: Yes, I can tell you that I've had a number of discussions with Minister McGuinty — in particular, I have talked about a civilian response force or group. I've talked to him a number of times, and we're continuing those discussions. He has a plan with respect to another type of reserve personnel that we've been talking about. I have raised with him, most certainly, the possibility and the potential for that reserve force, which would be separate from the usual — if I can call it that — Primary Reserve Force. One of its purposes would be, in fact, to assist with respect to emergency response in times of national natural disasters.

WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT

Hon. Robert Black: Minister, in June, the Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee released a report on Canada's escalating wildfire crisis. It highlighted the severe impacts of wildfires on public health, Indigenous communities and agriculture. One of the biggest challenges in responding to the crisis is the fragmentation of responsibility among different levels of government.

Can you tell us what specific steps you are taking to coordinate among levels of government to create a common real-time response to wildfires?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Thank you, senator. That's an issue that I'm very alive to and want to solve: It's the fact that the emergency management system is somewhat siloed and somewhat fragmented.

From my perspective, I would prefer us to have a better whole-of-federal-government response. That is what we heard from the Insurance Bureau of Canada. That is what we heard when I did a national public engagement last year.

At the present time, I can tell you that all options with respect to how to accomplish that are under consideration. I'm waiting for a couple of things. One is our federal-provincial-territorial, or FPT, in-person meeting with provinces and territories in November. The other is just an after-season action review that my own department will be doing, together with the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, or CIFFC, where we'll be analyzing data.

It's an important question, and I thank you for it.

Senator Black: Minister, Budget 2025 committed new funding to lease aircraft to bolster aerial firefighting capacity but provided no new commitment to coordinate wildfire response.

Will the government listen to the committee's key recommendation to establish a federal coordinating office for wildfires, and can we expect to see commitments in this fall's budget for coordinated response efforts?

Ms. Olszewski: Thank you for the question, senator. I'm going to connect it to the question that you asked before. That is, absolutely, something under consideration at this time.

Just with respect to what's been done, though, in terms of emergency management and preparedness from a federal perspective, we have surge capacity. Provinces and territories have their own aerial firefighting assets, for example. We leased the 10 you mentioned so we could provide additional search capacity so that where there are provinces and territories that don't have enough equipment, we're there for them.

• (1510)

We did, in fact, lease 10 aerial firefighting assets last year, which were a "bird dog," 4 air tankers and 5 heavy-lift helicopters.

EMERGENCY ALERTING SYSTEMS

Hon. Fabian Manning: Welcome to the Senate, minister.

Just a few weeks ago, six provinces experienced disruptions to 9-1-1 services following issues with Bell Canada's next-generation 9-1-1 network. I understand the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, is responsible for regulating telecommunications networks, including 9-1-1 services, and for reviewing network outages.

What role do you play in ensuring that Canadians can reliably and promptly access emergency services through 9-1-1 when they need them most?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Senator, with respect to 9-1-1 services, that is an aspect that our department is considering at this present time.

I don't have up-to-date information on that. If it's all right with you, I can respond to you in writing.

Senator Manning: Thank you for that, minister. I look forward to your written response.

As a follow-up, in Budget 2025, your government proposed investing \$55 million to support a new National Public Alerting System. Will that new system rely on networks such as Bell's next-generation 9-1-1 infrastructure? If so, what measures are being put in place to ensure that outages like the one experienced last month do not compromise a national emergency communications system?

Ms. Olszewski: Senator, at this point in time, I cannot tell you the exact technical nature of the system that will be put in place. What I can tell is that, as I indicated earlier, we're looking to modernize that system, which is out of date. I know my officials are in the process of reviewing what exactly that system should look like to ensure it's the most beneficial and the most helpful to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. This is very important.

NATIONAL ADAPTATION OFFICE

Hon. Mary Coyle: Welcome to you, minister.

Last May, Senator Muggli and I hosted an event with the Intact Centre for Climate Adaption entitled Extreme Weather and the National Interest: A Primer for Parliamentarians. That session outlined how, over the past 30 years, the financial costs of extreme weather in Canada have increased tenfold, driven by flooding and wildfires.

The statistics are startling. Flooding, as you know, is the most common and costly disaster in Canada. In the past decade, floods have averaged nearly \$800 million in insured losses annually, and 300,000 Canadians were evacuated in the past three wildfire seasons.

The Intact Centre was calling on the government to establish a national adaptation office to improve coordination across all orders of government to prepare communities for extreme weather events. Will your government commit to creating this national adaptation office?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: At the present time, I'm not aware of the status of discussions regarding such an office.

We absolutely know that flooding, as you've already indicated, is the most expensive in terms of the costs of recovery and resilience, as well. People think it's wildfires, but it's flooding.

There are some things we've done on the flooding side. I made an announcement with respect to a flood portal. I know we spoke earlier about educating Canadians. That flood portal is up and running. We're waiting for provinces and territories to take the next step. Homeowners can type in their address and learn about what their flood risk might be and what steps they can take to mitigate flooding losses.

In addition, the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements were updated around April 2025. There's a stream that was added that enables people making claims under those

arrangements to receive monies to mitigate against those types of losses in the future. In addition, through the Build Communities Strong Fund, there's a mitigation stream of —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[English]

Senator Coyle: Thank you. That is all good news, but a national coordinated adaptation office is something that would really help.

The Canadian Youth Climate Assembly presented their report to parliamentarians last September. One of their key recommendations included — and I know this is in your title as minister — urging government:

... to strengthen and invest in incentive programs to ensure that communities undertake deep retrofits and employ sustainable technologies. ... so that communities are better equipped for extreme climate disasters.

How is the government supporting communities now to improve their safety and resilience, particularly with regard to local infrastructure, in the face of this context of extreme climate events that we're living through?

Ms. Olszewski: There are a few things I could highlight in particular.

One is that there is a resilience organization that is in Toronto that is partly funded by the Government of Canada. The purpose of that organization is to work with local communities, especially smaller ones, and give them advice with respect to how they can mitigate against various types of natural disasters, but flooding in particular.

There's also another fund that we are contributing to. It was put in place by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and it is called the Green Municipal Fund. It also provides millions of dollars to help local municipalities invest in resilient —

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

SUPPORT FOR ALBERTA

Hon. Kristopher Wells: Minister, it is great to see you here from Edmonton.

On October 19, Albertans will vote on 10 referendum questions. One of these questions asks whether the Province of Alberta should begin the constitutional process toward a binding vote on separation. A report from ATB Financial and Calgary Economic Development indicates that, although Alberta's economy is primed for economic growth, this momentum could be slowed by the uncertainty brought about by the referendum.

Minister, can you tell us what kind of assessment the Government of Canada has made of this referendum's potential economic impact on Alberta and the wider Prairie region? What

is the Government of Canada doing to assure investors and employers that federal support for the region's economy remains steady and predictable, whatever the outcome might be?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: That's a great question, senator.

Of course, we know there have already been economic impacts with just the discussion about separatism — the length of time that those discussions have been taking place. You're absolutely right: There have been numerous reports, including from the chambers of commerce in Edmonton and Calgary, from the Business Council of Alberta and numerous other organizations, to the effect that we're already suffering economic losses. There are businesses that are making decisions not to hire or invest.

We really need a strong outcome. We need a decisive "remain" vote on October 19.

In terms of what the federal government is doing regarding separation and assuring investors, we've tried to act and not just tell people about separation. We've acted to reset the relationship with Alberta and to work so hard to partner with Alberta where we have common goals — to work with the province so we can do things like get Alberta's resources to markets, build appropriate housing in the province of Alberta and help strengthen defence supply chains in Alberta.

Those are pragmatic and real ways that our government has tried to work with Alberta and reassure investors and business people that we are there to —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[English]

Senator K. Wells: A concern that many of us share is that this referendum and the uncertainty it has brought to our economy, as you mentioned, will open a prolonged period of constitutional instability at a time when Albertan families are struggling to afford basic necessities, like food, housing and gas.

• (1520)

Can you tell us if the Government of Canada has done any contingency planning to protect Alberta's economy and ensure workers are protected should there be a prolonged period of economic and constitutional instability?

Ms. Olszewski: At this point in time, senator, with respect to what we're doing in the province of Alberta, as I've indicated, it's to show that we're in partnership with Alberta by continuing to invest and by continuing to ensure that Albertans understand that Alberta is central to our economic vision for the country.

In addition, at the present time, regarding financial support, the focus has really been on tariff relief and dealing with the global uncertainty and instability that's been caused to provinces, including Alberta, on account of tariffs.

In terms of support right now, the focus is on assisting small- and medium-sized businesses through Prairies Economic Development Canada, or PrairiesCan, but also larger —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[English]

GREEN ECONOMY

Hon. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler: Last December, you released the first progress report on the implementation of the Building a Green Prairie Economy Act, sponsored by the late Manitoba MP Jim Carr. It was an initiative to stimulate sustainable jobs in the Prairie provinces. The report emphasizes the actions that the government is taking, including an investment of \$7 billion, but it is a little short on the details about achieving the outcomes.

As the minister responsible for the Prairie Partnership Initiative, what indicators are you using to measure success in achieving the framework's goal of building a green economy in the Prairies?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: With respect to that initiative, it has actually been renamed, and you said the right name. It's the Prairie Partnership Initiative.

At the present time, the main focus of that initiative is to assist businesses that fall within that kind of arid desert zone between being eligible for PrairiesCan funding or regional development agency funding and being eligible for much larger sources of business support.

The Prairie Partnership Initiative, at the present time, is a way for businesses, municipalities and provinces to bring projects to the federal government. PrairiesCan helps convene a table at which many other ministers are present, and they can decide whether the project being brought to them is something they want to invest in. That, of course, includes green projects.

What that does is help businesses navigate a really complicated federal system where people have to approach different departments for project support. That's how that table is working at the present time.

At this time, I need to leave the room for a couple of minutes to vote. I will be right back. Thank you.

The Hon. the Speaker: I understand the minister must attend to her parliamentary obligations. We will resume where we left off when it is possible to do so.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

[Translation]

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, we will now resume ministerial Question Period. I will go back to Senator Osler for a supplementary question.

[English]

Senator Osler: Thank you, minister. Is the goal of building a green economy in the Prairies still a priority for the government, considering the significant economic and geopolitical changes that have emerged since the framework was first tabled?

Ms. Olszewski: I would say the framework has shifted somewhat, but the commitment to a green economy has not. That's the best answer I can provide.

Senator Osler: If there are any details you can share, that would be helpful, but I understand if that's all you can do.

Ms. Olszewski: Senator, what I can do is provide you with a list of projects that have made it through that table and been funded by various government departments, if that would be helpful to you. I think that would help show you the work being done by that table.

Senator Osler: Thank you, minister.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Hon. Leo Housakos (Leader of the Opposition): Minister, while experts continue to call for a stronger federal role in emergency preparedness and disaster mitigation, your government's efforts often seem to concentrate on disaster response.

Minister, you have given a number of examples of mitigation announcements, budgets and amounts, but it didn't help this year. What concrete results are you expecting out of those announcements and investments next year?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: Senator, just with respect to this last wildfire season, in 2025, there were 17 requests for federal assistance received by the federal government, specifically by my department. This year, there were two. I can't tell you anything other than anecdotally, but I would like to think the investments we've made — including our aerial firefighting capacity and investments in our humanitarian workforce — have had a positive impact.

That said, we know we need to do so much more in order to protect this country from wildfires, floods and potentially earthquakes as well. We are very focused on that.

I completely understand that we need to move from a situation where we're being just simply reactive and putting out fires or cleaning up floods to a situation where we're much more proactive.

As I've indicated to you, I have sought information from stakeholders from coast to coast to coast. I've talked to people about a national strategy.

• (1530)

I've met with hundreds of stakeholders over the last 16 months and we are working very hard to make sure we shift what we do from react —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[English]

Senator Housakos: I have one last question, minister. Has the government — and Parliament in general — looked at other regions of the world, other countries and how they deal with similar problems? Obviously, Canada's terrain is very unique, but there are places around the world — in the south, the north, the east, the west and around the globe. Has the government been in touch with other countries? Is there anything they're doing that we're not that we should be looking at?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada: That's a great question, senator. We know that many other countries are struggling with the effects of climate change. They have increased flooding in the same way we do. There are wildfires all around the world. I have personally, as has my department, been in touch with a number of other countries. I have spoken to emergency management officials in Australia, in Mexico and in Sweden as well. I have had direct discussions by Zoom with those individuals.

We have also studied models and emergency management models from other jurisdictions. One of the models that is most closely allied to us would be Australia. What they did after the bush fires was put in place a national agency —

[Translation]

The Hon. the Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Honourable senators, the time for Question Period has expired.

[English]

I am certain that you will want to join me in thanking Minister Olszewski for joining us today. We will now resume the proceeding that was interrupted at the start of Question Period.

Thank you, minister.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Brazeau, seconded by the Honourable Senator MacAdam, for the third reading of Bill S-202, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (warning label on alcoholic beverages).

Hon. Duncan Wilson: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak at third reading of Bill S-202, which aims to introduce warning labels on beverages that contain 1.1% or more alcohol. I would like to highlight the work Senator Brazeau has done on this matter, as I know this is an important and personal initiative for him.

Colleagues, I spent the summer studying this bill in detail. My team and I reviewed the committee's proceedings and met with several health experts, including the Canadian Cancer Society, the chair of the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health, as well as researchers from St. Francis Xavier University, the University of Victoria and Public Health Ontario. I also discussed the bill with the Canadian Craft Brewers Association, Beer Canada, Wine Growers British Columbia and several vineyard owners in British Columbia.

Colleagues, I'm not going to question the health effects of alcohol. While some studies show that alcohol consumption is associated with health risks, including certain cancers, others show that low or moderate alcohol consumption actually improves longevity and heart health.

Earlier this year, the American College of Cardiology published the results of a 10-year study involving more than 340,000 adults. The researchers found that heavy alcohol consumption increased the risk of death. By contrast, people who drank wine in moderation had a 21% lower risk of dying from cardiovascular disease than those who drank rarely or never. According to the study, this may be due in part to the compounds and antioxidants present in wine, which may have beneficial effects on cardiovascular health. This is not to downplay the health effects of alcohol consumption, however.

Some of the people I met over the summer made compelling arguments about this issue. However, this study also shows that research does not always yield the same results. I'm sure we're all familiar with this debate. It highlights the conflicting findings that have emerged from research on this issue, findings that I'm sure we've all heard about.

Honourable colleagues, my concern with this bill is whether it is the right way to tackle the issue. I don't believe that a Senate public bill is the right tool for establishing national labelling requirements, particularly when they involve health-related guidance.

According to standard practice, this decision should fall under Health Canada's jurisdiction. In Canada, the labelling of prepackaged food and beverages is governed by the Food and Drugs Act. The government implements new requirements through the Food and Drug Regulations. The government should take the lead in this process. It has the necessary tools and resources to conduct appropriate engagement and consultation activities before proposing changes to the way we package or label our food and beverages.

These consultations would help us better understand the potential impact of the changes on stakeholders, both in Canada and abroad. The Senate simply does not have the resources to undertake a task of this magnitude.

[English]

The regulatory approach also offers flexibility.

• (1540)

As labelling information requires updating over time, which is inevitable as science evolves, we would be taking away the government's ability to be nimble in updating labels when we codify the requirement through legislation.

It should be noted, per the Library of Parliament, that since 1989, there have been ten private members' bills in the House and two Senate public bills that have all sought to introduce health warning labels for alcoholic beverages. None of these have passed into law in numerous parliaments under various governments.

The arguments against passing such a bill have included the following: favouring public education campaigns over unilateral mandatory packaging requirements; economic concerns around financial burdens and supply chain complications for producers and manufacturers; creating trade friction by forcing international producers to maintain separate, Canada-specific production streams; domestic jurisdictional clashes, given that provincial and territorial governments control the distribution and sale of alcohol, which complicates unified implementation; and the overarching question as to whether standalone notices are effective in curbing heavy drinking while at the same time stigmatizing moderate consumption.

Honourable senators, over the summer, I met with several owners, operators and winemakers from B.C. wineries. I had the chance to better understand the state of the industry, as well as the impacts the bill would have on them.

In B.C., the vast majority of wineries are boutique and family-run operations. When I asked them why there wasn't a presence from B.C. wineries in the study of this bill, many of them indicated that they had not even heard of it, and of those who had, many were too busy with all the other issues facing them to have time to engage. The people who produce B.C.'s renowned wines are farmers and winemakers, not lobbyists.

This comes at a time when the wine industry is already facing substantial headwinds. Many of you know of the wildfires that ravaged the heart of British Columbia's wine country this summer; the industry is still dealing with their severe impacts. This occurred at a time when the B.C. wine industry was still in active recovery from a 2024 extreme weather event in which a cold snap caused catastrophic losses of nearly 99% of the typical wine grape production across British Columbia.

The wine industry is also facing economic uncertainty with the Wine Sector Support Program set to expire in March. This federal funding initiative has helped producers shoulder excise taxes and adapt to climate events, high operating costs and changing trade rules. It has been backed by \$343 million in government investments since its launch in 2022, but its sunseting is causing a crisis within an industry that is long-term oriented in its planning.

These headwinds are underscored by the fact that Canadians are already drinking less. Statistics Canada data shows that national alcohol sales have hit a 20-year low.

Our wine industry is also in the crosshairs of the U.S. trade war, as they have already been subject to a 50% tariff; and now, as of a few days ago, Canadian alcohol is completely shut out of the United States.

Colleagues, this is an industry under assault from social trends, economic pressures and international spats. If yet another burden is to be placed on this industry, as this bill proposes, it should be done under the direction of Health Canada, after adequate consultation and engagement with all impacted parties, as has historically been the case.

It should be noted, colleagues, that the government is already very proactive in its ongoing efforts to address substance use and related harms, including alcohol. This is being done through the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy, which is a whole-of-government approach to substance use, including alcohol-related harms, and underscores the importance of timely access to prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services. It supports their availability when and where Canadians need them.

For these reasons, I urge senators to consider whether prescribing labelling requirements through an inflexible act of Parliament is the most appropriate vehicle. There are other avenues to address the underlying issues at play and to work with the government to ensure that Canadians have access to the best information. For these reasons, I will be opposing this bill.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Hon. Robert Black: Senator Wilson, will you take a question?

Senator Wilson: Yes.

Senator Black: Thank you. You mentioned craft and boutique wineries, small distilleries, craft breweries and small craft cideries. Their margins are small to begin with. Would you agree that asking them to do additional work and undertake the responsibilities that will be required by this bill may, in fact, be too much for some of them? You met with a number of them over the summer. Can you expand on what you found as far as margins? I expect there were small margins in many cases.

Senator Wilson: Thank you for the question. Yes, small margins indeed. In some cases, there are not even small positive margins, given some of the forces they are facing. The cost of labelling is significant, and as you can appreciate, wine is made and vintages are kept for long periods of time. They will be stocked outside of the wineries' control, so point-of-sale labelling and other things may be required in order to be able to achieve the desired effect. In this industry, design, including the design of the labels, is also very important. It is part of their marketing; it's part of their brand.

It was really heartening that all of them recognized the importance of ensuring consumption is appropriate, and they are prepared to do their part. However, they want to be part of the conversation and to be engaged with. A number of them had very creative suggestions for how to get that information out to consumers. A prescriptive approach like this, placing burdens on already struggling businesses, may put them from barely in the black into the red.

Hon. Andrew Cardozo: Would the senator take another question?

Senator Wilson: Yes.

Senator Cardozo: Thank you. As you may be aware, I spoke in favour of the bill a couple of days ago. As I understand your argument, you are saying that it may be dangerous, but it is kind of difficult for wine makers at this point, given the economics of it, so maybe this is not the time to do it even though it may be cancer causing. We shouldn't do it because of the cost. That's one of my concerns about your presentation.

My other concern is this: You are aware that sections 5.1(c) and (d) of the Food and Drugs Act give the department the authority to determine the labelling and, therefore, to consult with people at that point. It also notes that the bill would not come into effect until the year after it has passed into law. So you have that year in which there is plenty of time to consult. Do you think there is enough time for the department to consult on that point? It seems to me that it has the ability to do exactly what you are saying it could do. The department would make those determinations in consultation with people.

Senator Wilson: It is not purely a cost discussion. First of all, in my view, the legislation is very prescriptive. It specifies the volume and the number of standard drinks. Yes, it does give flexibility to the department in sections 5.1 (c) and (d), but it is still being very prescriptive in terms of what goes on with the packaging, which, in my view, is something better handled through regulation.

From a health point of view, yes, it is significant. Obviously, there are risks involved in drinking alcohol, and frankly, some of the harms alcohol has created for society are much bigger than the ones we are talking about in terms of family violence and the like. It doesn't make sense to specifically focus on the risk of cancer when there are other factors at play. For example, my family has a history of heart disease. Heart disease is a bigger risk factor for me, based on the medical advice I have been given, than the types of cancer we are talking about. Maybe, for me, drinking wine is better than not drinking it, so putting a warning label on something that may scare people off may not be the right thing. I'm not a scientist. I don't know if that —

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Wilson, I regret to inform you that your time has expired. If you would like to answer the question, you will need to request leave for more time.

• (1550)

Senator Wilson: If I could have 60 seconds, I can finish.

The Hon. the Speaker: I also have Senator Ringuette on the list. If there is agreement, I will add five minutes to your debate time.

[Translation]

Is leave granted?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

[English]

Senator Wilson: Thank you. It's void of context. It is putting out messaging about one particular type of effect. I think what should happen is Health Canada, in consultation with the medical profession, science and industry, should figure out what's best to put on it. I don't think that is something we should do.

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette: Senator Wilson, will you take another question?

Senator Wilson: Yes.

Senator Ringuette: Senators, you all know that I'm a smoker, and I also enjoy a good glass of wine. However, this summer, I started drinking non-alcoholic wine, and it is clearly indicated on the label. It is still very much enjoyable.

But the label is just paper, and the cost of paper is absolutely minimal, not only for Canadian producers but also for all the imports that we bring into the country. My grandson is into this thing called "six-seven." From my perspective, with all the speeches that we give, don't you think that health issues regarding alcohol have now been demonstrated to be as important as the health issues related to cigarettes? I'm living proof so far.

Senator Wilson: My primary argument is that this is not the appropriate vehicle to do something like this. If putting cancer warning labels on alcoholic beverages is the right thing to do, I think it needs to be done after thorough consultation and in consideration of all the other research out there.

As I indicated, the American Society of Cardiologists study was with 340,000 people over 10 years. That's not a small data set. It showed a 21% reduction in longevity as a result of drinking moderate amounts of wine.

I would put to you that there are arguments on both sides. I think what we need to have is some moderation in the messaging. It is not one thing or the other; there are a variety of risks that need to be understood. There may also be some benefits. I don't feel that I'm equipped to make those decisions. I think they should be made by Health Canada in consultation with industry, science and medicine.

Senator Ringuette: I'm always under the impression that Senate committees are thorough in their evaluations, so I looked at the report with respect to where we are at this stage.

Essentially, if you found there were not enough witnesses at the committee, then you should be suggesting that the report go back to the committee. Or are you ready to put forth an amendment? What is your "six-seven"?

Senator Wilson: I don't agree that there was adequate consultation as part of the committee process. It is not that the committee didn't try to reach out. I know they did.

It was interesting. We heard about this big alcohol lobby. Microbreweries were the only organizations that reached out to me while that was going on. I had to perform outreach in the B.C. wine industry. I had to talk to folks in my own province to find out, and they didn't know about it.

This is an example of how we think we are the centre of the universe here in the Senate, but we are not. People don't know what we are doing. That's why I think a broader consultation led by Health Canada is warranted.

(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 3:56 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.)

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