



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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1st SESSION

• 44th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 153

• NUMBER 5

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## **PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT**

**BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED**

Speech by:  
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

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**Hon. Patricia Bovey** moved second reading of Bill S-202, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate).

She said: Honourable senators, I speak from the unceded territory of the Algonquin and as a Manitoban, as from the territory for the as-yet-unfulfilled Treaty 1, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Ojibway, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene and Dakota and the homeland of the Métis.

Senators, I rise today to speak at second reading to Bill S-202, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate). This is the fourth iteration of this bill, first introduced in May 2016 by our former colleague Senator Wilfred Moore. Passed unanimously by this chamber twice, it unfortunately died on the Order Paper twice in the other place, despite having all-party support prior to the dissolution of Parliament last June 2021.

It would be wonderful to have it passed in both houses and become law before I retire from this chamber in 18 months. Bill S-202 would create the position of a visual artist laureate, a position which would be similar to that of the Parliamentary Poet Laureate; complementary yet working in different mediums. Like the poet laureate, the visual artist laureate would be an officer of the Library of Parliament, which provides for independence from Parliament like the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

If passed, this bill provides that the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons shall select the artist laureate from a list of three names that reflect Canada's diversity, provided by a committee chaired by the Parliamentary Librarian. The committee would include the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages, the CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts, the director of the National Gallery of Canada and the chair of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts or their designates.

[*Translation*]

The visual artist laureate would serve the Speakers of both chambers for a term not exceeding two years. As I have already mentioned, their mandate would be to promote the arts in Canada by producing or causing to be produced artistic creations. At the request of either Speaker, he or she could produce artistic creations for use in Parliament or on occasions of state. The visual artist laureate could also sponsor artistic events and give advice to the Parliamentary Librarian regarding the Library's collection and acquisitions to enrich the Library's cultural holdings. Either the Speaker or the Parliamentary Librarian could ask the visual artist laureate to perform other related duties.

As I have already mentioned in this chamber, the visual artist laureate would definitely portray Canada's diversity, no matter the medium used — painting, print-making, sculpture, design, video, film, art installation, photography or other. Any artist appointed to the position of visual artist laureate would consider it an honour to serve as an ambassador for the arts and creative works in the Parliamentary precinct. Indeed, the term "laureate" denotes the honour for distinction in a particular field.

[*English*]

This portrayal of our diversity and our need to understand each other — whether on a federal, provincial, territorial or cultural level — is paramount, especially now as we move forward as a country. Artists have always depicted or discussed contemporary issues in their work and drawn attention to critical concerns. It is clear, for instance, that understanding each other will play a key role in reconciliation, for which cultural understanding is essential.

For instance, Alberta artist Joane Cardinal-Schubert's 1990s installation *The Lesson* provided a clairvoyant and clarion call to understanding the redress which predated the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Faye Heavyshield's 1985 work *Sisters* — long before the national inquiry was established — drew attention to the need for sisters to support each other, a truly poignant universal statement with the tragedy of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. For years, Jane Ash Poitras's paintings have presented her poignant insights into the unmarked graves at residential schools, while Robert Houle has documented many issues around colonization in our collective treaties. Isn't it time that the work of our two houses become part of these visual conversations? I feel the same regarding environmental and climate change concerns, which artists like Don Proch have been highlighting in their work for decades.

We all heard Senator Ataullahjan's poignant statement last week depicting the situation in Afghanistan. The ustad burying his rabab, the symbolic burying of the cultural expression of the Afghan people. She said:

For me, the burying of the rabab is a significant act. The strings of the rabab pull at the heartstrings of everyone for that region. For me, it signifies the burying of the heart and the soul of Afghanistan.

I repeat that here because culture is a cornerstone of who we are, and without the arts our unique voices go unheard, and I believe those visual voices should carry our parliamentary messages and work.

Colleagues, I could go on with examples to prove that Canada does indeed have many excellent artists who give voice to the various perspectives regarding societal issues, but I won't. We have seen — even in the small installations in this chamber of Indigenous work, the new presentation of Inuit art and our two iterations of honouring Canada's Black artists — that visual expression does make a difference and creates new

understandings. I think our work and theirs would indeed be strengthened by the work and the presence of a parliamentary visual artist laureate as it has with our Parliamentary Poets Laureate.

In previous speeches I have highlighted the value of our artistic sector to the Canadian economy and there are compelling economic statistics from Canada's cultural industries. Statistics Canada publishes the Canadian Culture Satellite Account, which for instance, found that the GDP of cultural industries in 2017 was \$58.9 billion or \$1,611 per capita, equalling 2.8% of national GDP.

According to the most recent Statistics Canada and Hill Strategies report, between 2010 and 2017, the GDP of culture products increased by 16%. The number of jobs in that period related to culture products increased by 7%. In 2017, there were indeed 715,400 jobs directly related to cultural industries, or 3.8% of all jobs in the country.

[*Translation*]

Of course, the pandemic has dealt a serious blow to our economy and the arts and culture sector. The federal government has recognized this. The most recent budget provides funding for this sector, as it will be one of the last to recover from the pandemic.

[*English*]

According to Hill Strategies' research, the total value of goods and services in the culture sector decreased by 10% between 2019 and 2020. Between 2019 and 2020, 55% of organizations and businesses in the arts, entertainment and recreation experienced a revenue drop of at least 30%. Organizations have outright closed to the tune of 8% since 2019. The 594,000 employment and self-employed positions in the culture sector in 2020 represented the lowest job total since 2010. The performing arts and festivals have been hardest hit, losing 52% of sales and 36% of jobs between 2019 and 2020.

As I mentioned in debate in the last Parliament, through the pandemic, I've spoken to over 600 artists and they have been telling me that passing this bill, even though there will only be one visual artist laureate every two years, would be an important welcome vote of moral support for our artists in these dark times. Artists working in other disciplines — musicians, writers and actors — have also echoed those sentiments in my meetings and conversations with them. I can assure you that parliamentary support for this will be extremely well received.

[*Translation*]

Honourable colleagues, the arts are a universal language that we all speak. The arts break down barriers and help us understand one another. I like to think that as we look back on our nation's history, we are reminded of the many great artists who have represented Canada through multiple visual media and the rich tapestry of the many peoples and cultures that inhabit this place.

Our story is and has been told by many visual artists who see this land through a myriad of viewpoints and lenses. Each contributes to the vision of Canada. The same is true of the visual artist laureate.

[*English*]

So it is with these thoughts in mind that I thank you all for your support for the arts and culture sector in Canada and ask once again for that same support in making this legislation a reality, hopefully within my remaining time in this chamber. I hope we can help the restart of the arts in this country by moving this bill forward quickly to the other place, recognizing that twice already we have passed it unanimously, and it was so close to being voted on in the other place before the election call. Thank you.

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