



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION

• 44th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 153

• NUMBER 24

NET-ZERO EMISSIONS FUTURE

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Speech by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, March 3, 2022

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

NET-ZERO EMISSIONS FUTURE

INQUIRY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I am speaking to you from Treaty 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene and Dakota, the birthplace of the Métis Nation and the heart of the Métis Nation homeland.

Senator Coyle, I accept your invitation. I rise to add a visual and museological perspective to your inquiry, which calls our attention to the importance of finding solutions to transition Canada's society, economy and resource use in pursuit of a fair, prosperous, sustainable and peaceful net-zero emissions future for our country and the planet.

I fully support this objective, and I believe that we can find these solutions. We know that collaboration between multiple sectors, both in Canada and in the world, will be necessary, with a constructive vision and a commitment from individuals, communities, industry, scientists, environmentalists and not-for-profit organizations — in short, from everyone.

Colleagues, I applaud the many ways that the Senate's standing committees and working groups are rising to these challenges. The intersections of these approaches are encouraging and important.

Museums are responding to this crisis in their collections, exhibitions, shipping, mechanical systems and even their restaurant menus. Museums' and galleries' roles are to communicate realities, including eco-awareness to educate audiences through exhibitions and their programs. More than 550 organizations have formed the international Gallery Climate Coalition to "facilitate the decarbonisation of the visual arts sector and promote zero waste practices." They have a decarbonization plan.

But museums must also consider their carbon footprint. An article in *Canadian Art*, entitled "The Green Cube," states:

Museums are regularly forums for such big ideas. But seldom do we consider: are they also places that practice them?

Noting art and exhibitions do have environmental costs, what are their impacts? How are museums mitigating those impacts? A 2021 Statistics Canada survey showed that nearly two thirds of Canada's arts, entertainment and recreational organizations and businesses have some type of environmental practice or policy, but that:

"Requirements for climate action are still quite rare in national cultural policy", as are connections between government departments that are responsible for culture and the environment.

And that:

The cultural community needs "the policy frameworks and authority, funding and accountability to be fully mainstreamed into national environmental planning".

I know improvements will come. This sector is aware of the goals and is transitioning, adding to the dialogue and drawing from that dialogue.

Individual artists have been giving visual voice to environmental and climate change concerns for years. I thank Senator Coyle and Senator Kutcher for their idea to include art in the possible commission of a piece heralding the Senate working group's goals. Rather than commissioning, which is complex, costly, time-consuming and with clearly articulated processes, we have been exploring borrowing art.

[Translation]

We have chosen instead to borrow two works by two established and internationally renowned Canadian artists, Roberta Bondar and Ed Burtynsky. The theme is "Visual Voices: Climate Change & Environment."

[English]

Artists have for decades portrayed the realities of environmental preservation, and more recently the understanding of the effects of climate change. One — astronaut, neurologist and artist Roberta Bondar, working with NASA — depicts endangered species. Another — recipient of the Governor General's Awards in the Visual and Media Arts, Ed Burtynsky, with support from industry and business — documents human impacts on various locales in his art. In their photographs, both these artists honestly present what they see and call us to preserve our planet and to sustain life — human, flora and fauna — and to work together as individuals, communities and industry.

Artists' visual voices are drawing global citizens into the reality of our planet's crisis.

Let's go back to 1939. As I said earlier today, I believe Emily Carr was the first Canadian artist to address environmental issues in art. From 1939 to the early 1940s, she did a number of paintings depicting the concerns of clear-cutting, such as *Logged-over Hillside*. Each summer, a friend towed her trailer, called "The Elephant," to the site she wanted to paint. I would be delighted to take you to some of her favourite sites.

In her journals *Hundreds and Thousands*, Carr revealed her observations and hopes for renewal:

Yesterday I went into a great forest, I mean a portion of growth undisturbed for years and years. Way back, some great, grand trees had been felled, leaving their stumps with the ragged row of "screamers" in the centre, the last chords to break, chords in the tree's very heart. Growth had

repaired all the damage and hidden the scars. There were second-growth trees . . . that stood at the foot of those mighty arrow-straight monarchs long since chewed by steel teeth in the mighty mills, chewed into utility, nailed into houses, churches, telephone poles, all the “woodsiness” extracted, nothing remaining but wood.

Many artists, working in all media, have since portrayed the realities of place and change, beauty and devastation. Not wanting to be negative but wanting to show where we are “at,” they call us to action to turn the tide of potential environmental devastation.

We must preserve the miracle that former grand chief, artist and poet Ovide Mercredi reveals in his poem *The Earth*:

The Earth is a great miracle
The author of its unique destiny
A traveler in unending space
The designer of all its beauty
The orchestra of all natural events
Benign or catastrophic.

Governor General’s Visual Arts Award recipient Carole Sabiston, long interested in space, worries about the debris we leave up there. Her textile assemblages, like *Take Off: Point Of Departure And Mode Of Travel*, 1987-1989, bring that issue to light.

Multi-award recipient artist Aganetha Dyck worked for decades with global scientists researching the international concern of decreasing bee populations. Bees were her art collaborators.

In his compelling elevator sculptures, Don Proch, who grew up on a Prairie farm, has drawn attention since the 1970s to farmers’ acid rain concerns. His 2019 *From Asessippi to Altona* portrays Prairie fields, skies, the grain elevator with its characteristic drive-through and the wind farm near Altona, Manitoba.

Artist David McMillan photographed the immediate devastation of Chernobyl after the nuclear disaster. He returned to the same sites annually, for years — almost two decades — documenting the changes, the deterioration of the man-made structures and the slow appearance of bits of vegetation.

Inuit artists across the North have also created compelling work over decades, depicting their changing lives and concerns about climate change.

[*Translation*]

Let us now turn to Roberta Bondar and Edward Burtynsky. I have organized exhibits of these two esteemed artists. Both of them truly love our planet. Neither one hesitates to show it and to call on society to make changes.

[*English*]

Much-honoured astronaut, neurologist and artist Roberta Bondar draws from her experiences and accomplishments in each of her professions, tying them together in her art. Seeing our planet from space made an indelible impact on her, which she shares with us through her art.

She hangs from planes, climbs trees and balances on limbs to get the images she wants. She has no fear in creating her images but fears for the world’s endangered species. Her well-known *Discovering Canada’s National Parks* series documents the richness of our country’s land, taking us to parts of this nation we may not have seen in person. She is working with NASA again, this time as an artist, to create her project on endangered birds.

Bondar wrote to me about her image *Endangered Shadows*:

. . . the abstract three-dimensional background of a remnant pond in the Prairie Pothole Region of Saskatchewan looks like a wave that threatens to engulf [the Whooping Cranes], portending dangers that they will face during this twice yearly flight. The long, fall shadows of the cranes underscore their evanescence.

Years ago, Alberta’s energy sector sponsored the exhibition of Ed Burtynsky’s *Oil Sands* series, clearly indicating their active part in finding solutions. I applaud their development of clean energy and the increasing number of wind and solar installations across Canada.

Burtynsky’s 2018 London Photo Festival submissions, as international celebrated guest artist, were captivating. I was pleased to see his work in that context and to hear his lecture. His two- and three-dimensional works showed landfills with mountains of discarded tires and computer elements. I am sure he is aware of the new museum in Nigeria showing issues of waste.

Burtynsky’s National Gallery of Canada and Art Gallery of Ontario exhibitions, and 2018 book *Anthropocene* explored these issues with artistic honesty and integrity, and he presented next steps. He does not harp on particular industries. Rather, he calls for collaboration of thought, action and vision.

We need fuel to heat our homes, for travel and in making the materials we use daily. He states:

When I first started photographing industry it was out of a sense of awe at what we as a species were up to. Our achievements became a source of infinite possibilities. But time goes on, and that flush of wonder began to turn. The car that I drove cross-country began to represent not only freedom, but also something much more conflicted. I began to think about oil itself: as both the source of energy that makes everything possible, and as a source of dread, for its ongoing endangerment of our habitat.

Colleagues, Hill Strategies Research underlines the inextricable link between the arts and the environment in their January 12 blog. The international Climate Heritage Network identifies some of these relationships:

Culture anchors people to places and to each other. It can create cohesion in ways that enable community-building and collective action. Artists and cultural voices drive public awareness and actions; their work can be a powerful tool for climate mobilization. Through public accessibility and trust, cultural institutions like museums and libraries provide platforms for listening to communities and hubs of multicultural and inter-generational exchange, capacity building and knowledge-sharing.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, I was delighted to learn that, in December, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or MIT, brought together academics and musicians for an environmental solutions initiative entitled “Artists and Scientists Together on Climate Solutions.” This proves that the solution to climate change will not emerge from a single area, but from all cultures.

Dava Newman, a professor at the MIT Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, noted that while scientists collect vast amounts of data that demonstrate the changes happening on our planet, communication is the biggest challenge faced by the scientific community. According to Dava Newman, human behaviour will require working together across the boundaries of different disciplines and areas of expertise, which could be crucial to winning the battle against climate warming.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we have the opportunity to garner support and awareness from all regions and all sectors in our country, as we are from all regions and all sectors. Let us follow the vision of scientists and artists; let us be proactive in our collaborations and open to hearing the hard facts and learning from the inspirations of many.

Let us do our part: listen, examine, study and change the ways that need to be changed.

Thank you, Senator Coyle. Thank you, colleagues.
