



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

2nd SESSION • 43rd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 152 • NUMBER 11

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—
DEBATE

Speech by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Tuesday, November 17, 2020

THE SENATE

Tuesday, November 17, 2020

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—
DEBATE

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I rise once again as sponsor and in support of Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate). This is the third time it has been introduced in this chamber. It has been to committee and had had unanimous support from the Senate, which sent it to the other place, where it died when Parliament rose for the election. I brought it back to our last session and now do so again post-prorogation.

First brought forward by our former colleague, Senator Moore, Bill S-205 creates a visual artist laureate on Parliament Hill in the same spirit and with the same reasoning as our poet laureate. The visual arts are an international language, giving non-verbal expression to the soul and substance of who we are as Canadians. Art has kept us together during these difficult times.

The need for the arts has been particularly apparent during the pandemic, the horrific murders in Nova Scotia and through the Black Lives Matter issues and protests. Indeed, we see the power nationally and internationally, even in the small space dedicated to honouring Canada's Black artists in the Senate foyer. Art will bring us back together again in our real lives when the pandemic subsides.

[*Translation*]

It goes without saying that society has changed since this bill was introduced for the first time and the Senate supported it. Times are tough, as the news would suggest. Protests on various issues are on the rise, and great support is being shown for people who are in need, who are angry, or who have experienced defamation and discrimination.

[*English*]

Canadians are looking for good news, and for positives, honesty and empowerment in their daily lives. This bill does that. A visual artist laureate on the hill will bring Canadians the substance of the endeavours of Parliament. It will underline the importance of our democracy today, and present the issues and work parliamentarians do on behalf of all Canadians. It will communicate the values, perspectives, principles and realities to lifelong and new Canadians, as well as to immigrants and refugees, regardless of their mother tongue.

A parliamentary artist laureate will certainly show Canada's diversity, no matter the visual medium used — painting, printing, sculpture, drawing, video, film, installation, photography, or any other visual medium. Any artist appointed to the position of visual artist laureate would consider it an honour to serve as an arts ambassador and creator of work related to Parliament Hill. Indeed, the word "laureate" itself denotes the honour of distinction in a particular field.

The Parliament of Canada has never had a visual artist laureate, but there are precedents of visual artist laureates in various Canadian jurisdictions, including the Province of Ontario, and cities like Victoria and Toronto. Indigenous artist Christi Belcourt received the Ontario Arts Council Aboriginal Arts Award laureate in 2014. The City of Toronto's photography laureate for 2019-2022 is Michèle Pearson Clark, who, in her words, "is using her role to inspire change in the city and encourage social justice."

Many states, including New York, South Dakota, Texas and New Hampshire, have visual artist laureates. Australia and the U.K. have children's laureates who have simultaneously been visual artists. So too does Culver City in California.

Honourable senators, as you know, Bill S-205 — the Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate Bill — amends the Parliament of Canada Act in order to create the position of parliamentary artist laureate. It is based on exactly the same principle. The artist laureate, like the Poet Laureate, would be an officer of the Library of Parliament, as are the Parliamentary Budget Officer and other officers of Parliament. This ensures their independence.

As drafted, the speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons shall select the artist laureate from a list of three names 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 artist laureate would serve the speakers of the two chambers for a term of no more than two years and, as I already mentioned, his or her mandate would be to promote the arts in Canada through Parliament by producing or causing to be produced artistic creations. At the request of either Speaker, he or she could produce creations for use in Parliament or on occasions of state. The artist laureate could also sponsor artistic events and give advice to the Parliamentary Librarian regarding the collection of the Library of Parliament and acquisitions to enrich the library's cultural holdings. Either Speaker could also ask the artist laureate to perform other related duties.

What would the benefits be to Canadians? The portrayal and communication to Canadians of the work of Parliament and our national issues through the artist laureate's works. As Calgary's poet laureate, Derek Beaulieu, has said, to be "a lever for cultural change."

It has been stated many times that "the arts are the most powerful tool we have for social change." In dealing with issues of poverty, race discrimination, crime prevention, health and more, we need these tools more than ever before.

[English]

Simon Brault, Canada Council for the Arts Director and CEO, wrote in his book *No Culture, No Future*:

Arts and Culture cannot save the world, but can help change it. . . . Art's power to transform and enchant is gaining ground. . . . Culture is the future.

The 1999 all-party parliamentary report, *A Sense of Place — A Sense of Being* stated:

The role of artists is not only to mirror the values of the society in which they live, but also to reflect on the issues that society must address if it is to know itself better.

The visual artist laureate would do exactly that: mirror and interpret the work of Parliament and the issues on which we deliberate, and reflect on what is seen, heard and perceived consciously and unconsciously. Their work would help address the gap in the knowledge of civics, the role of democracy and the workings of Parliament, and, I would hope, help increase the rates of youthful voters.

I believe the work of our visual artist laureate would be inspiring to all, opening new doors for youth, connecting new Canadians and all citizens in every region, and bring us to each other, with a new understands of civics, government issues and processes. The visual arts also is a language children and youth understand and use all the time.

[Translation]

You have heard me talk about the compelling economic statistics from Canada's cultural industries. Statistics Canada publishes the Canadian Culture Satellite Account, which provides, and I quote:

measures of the economic importance of culture (inclusive of the arts and heritage) and sport across Canada in terms of output, gross domestic product and employment. . . .

[English]

Showing leadership by increasing the awareness of the role of the arts would increase that economic impact. The CSA report, 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 StatCan and Hill Strategies:

Between 2010 and 2017, the GDP of culture products increased by 16% . . .

That figure is not adjusted for inflation.

The number of jobs related to culture products increased by 7% . . .

In 2017, there were 715,400 jobs directly related to culture industries, or 3.8% of all jobs in the country.

We in the Senate and Parliament unquestionably have a strong societal responsibility. So, too, do artists. Let us bring those responsibilities together in a concrete and meaningful way, with a visual artist laureate.

I want to read, as I have in this chamber before, the special poem and statement written several years ago, at my request, by our seventh Poet Laureate George Elliott Clarke, regarding the visions for a visual artist laureate. First, his preamble:

Any public official permitted the mandate to promote Canadian arts and letters, music and dance, theatre and film, is a de facto inspirer of dream, which is the origin of law, the wellspring of prosperity, and the guardian of liberty. The more we value literacy in arts and culture, the more we invest in greater comfort and convenience, opportunity and enlightenment, and a society that has no throwaway persons, but only a citizenry considered priceless and invaluable, for all are capable of dream. . . .

And now our laureate's poem "On the Proposal for a Visual Artist Laureate".

The blank page — the blank canvas is —
Undeniably delicious —
Like fog, which obscures, then reveals —
What Hope imminently congeals —
A fantastic architecture —
Imagination born secure:
What Vision — the I of the eye —
Had dreamt, is What answering Why. . . .
Rainbows erupt from paint or ink —
And film sculptures light — in a blink;
A needle, weaving, is lyric,
And whatever is shaped is epic.
Art's each I articulate,
Whose vision ordains a laureate.

Colleagues, I feel this position is one of inspiration that will draw us together. Through the visual arts, we can engage and encourage debate on and off the Hill, and link the work of parliamentarians with ordinary Canadians across the country.

As we look back on the history of our nation, we are reminded of the many great artists who have portrayed Canada in multiple visual media and the rich tapestry of the many peoples and cultures who call this place home. Our story is, and has been, told through many visual artists who see this land through myriad views and lenses. Each contributes to the vision of Canada. So, too, will our visual artist laureate.

I believe that creating a parliamentary visual artist laureate will shine the proper light on Canada's Parliament and our artists and their works, in the spirit of explaining the Canadian experience at home and abroad. As George Clarke said to me in his note, "All are capable of dreams." Or as he, this inspirer of dream, wrote of that delicious blank canvas, "Art's each I articulate, whose vision ordains a laureate."

Senators, I have heard from many artists how important this position is. Indeed, the shock waves across the country when it did not get to third reading in the House of Commons before the election were strong and visceral. My phone lines were burning,

my email was full and the messages from individuals and in the press and art publications were clear and unanimous: This bill is needed and wanted.

More recently, through the pandemic, artists have been telling me that passing this bill — even though there will be only 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, 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. I hope that once again you will support this bill. Thank you.
