

THE HONOURABLE PATRICIA BOVEY, FRSA, FCMA
SENATOR – MANITOBA



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SÉNATRICE – MANITOBA

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CANADA

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

This mid-summer letter comes with hopes that you and yours are enjoying a break, despite the constrictions and worries over COVID-19. There is no question that the world has changed in many ways these past months, and I want to take this opportunity to bring you up to date on some of the developments affecting us.

In the midst of the COVID crisis, the world has been rightly consumed with Black Lives Matter. I am grateful that the Black members of the Senate have established an informal working committee which is drawing attention to, and making recommendations on, a number of aspects affecting Black people across Canada. The scope of this group is wide and includes economic, health, education, and employment issues. Once again, I turn to the arts. Black artists have, and do, play a truly significant role in our nation. Music, film, visual art, writing, indeed every creative discipline, has been enhanced by the vision, innovation and excellence of the work of Black artists. George Elliott Clarke served as Canada's Poet Laureate on Parliament Hill in 2016 to 2017. The films of D. Sylvia Hamilton, including *The Little Black Schoolhouse*, have received much acclaim nationally and internationally. I am also really proud that African-Canadian Vancouver artist Stan Douglas will be representing Canada at the 2021 Venice Biennale. He has received major awards and international acclaim for his work over many years. Other Black visual artists have likewise received national and international recognition, including Chantal Gibson and Yisa Akinbolaji to name but two. As I write, I am developing a proposal for discussion for the presentation of work by Black artists in the Senate of Canada Building. When the Senate Session recommences in September, I will be speaking to the Racism Inquiry. I will also speak to a Senate Inquiry on the contributions made by immigrants who have come to Canada from all parts of the world, including those from Haiti, Barbados and various parts of Africa, to mention only several points of origination.

Kudos are due to the many creative and innovative ways organizations and artists have found to connect with audiences through these last months. I have been inspired by the use of the internet and the ways of bringing art and performances to small groups through interesting partnerships, such as Jazz Winnipeg and Dalnavert Museum's Sunday garden concerts. I was really pleased to visit the Winnipeg Art Gallery when it opened several months ago – indeed one of the first galleries to do so. The new website for the Portrait Gallery of Canada went live at the end of July. I have met with Comedy artists to discuss how they can get support as creators, and I am in regular contact with musicians and visual artists. As schools resume the questions of how

to teach and engage students in the creative arts abound. I have faith that creative solutions based on science and reality will emerge as they have in other aspects of COVID-19!

The pandemic has also brought to light many truly serious gaps in Canadian society. We must find a way to stop the widening of those gaps and to reduce systemic gaps going forward. Basic income, about which I first spoke in the Chamber in May 2017, has again come to the fore. The goal of a basic income is to ensure the principle that every Canadian is able to buy food, clothes, and medications, and have a roof over their head, and not have to make choices as to which it will be for that particular month.

As I have focused on the specific situations affecting the arts and artists in different parts of the country during COVID 19, I have, as you know, also looked at the overall situation for the sector. John Ralston Saul wrote in the 1990s that “Culture is the motor of any successful society”. I agreed with him then, and still do. Arts and culture form the platform for all of society, sustaining us through both good and bad times. Yet artists still comprise the largest percentage of working poor living below the poverty line. Art, artists and arts workers live and contribute in every corner of Canada, and we must find a way to ensure that they and all Canadians have a basic income.

I want to draw your attention to recent announcements regarding COVID-19 programs. I was pleased that Parliament passed the one-time payment for those living with disabilities. I was also pleased to see the assistance for small museums, including those which had not before received federal assistance. The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy program has also been extended. I suggest you check the Federal Website for details and applications for these and all programs. However, I fear the road back for arts groups after COVID will be hard, and that the performing arts may well be one of the last sectors to recover. I am also very concerned about individual artists working in every medium given the ending of CERB. CERB was a lifeline, and a needed lifeline. I urgently ask the Government to continue assistance for artists in need. Jobs are not there right now; they need help.

Please continue to be in touch with me with your concerns and ideas. You can reach me through e-mail or phone. I remain in Winnipeg, where I have been since mid-March, but I will go to Ottawa for the fall session of the Senate. Due to COVID, and travel and quarantining restrictions, I will likely be there until we rise in December. I am reachable in both cities, and continue to work on behalf of Manitobans, the North, and Canada’s creative sector across the country!

Thank you for your ideas, and for your care and patience as we all live through these challenging times.



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Independent Senator from Manitoba