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DECLARATION ON THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF ARTISTS AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN CANADA BILL

THIRD READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Speech by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Wednesday, September 28, 2022

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THIRD READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Patricia Bovey moved third reading of Bill S-208, An Act respecting the Declaration on the Essential Role of Artists and Creative Expression in Canada, as amended.

She said: Honourable senators, in speaking to third reading of this declaration on the essential role of artists and creative expression in Canada, I want to start with sincere thanks to, and on behalf of, Canada's artists and arts organizations, as well as audiences from all corners of our country. The interest and support, and indeed, requests for this bill have resounded from artists and arts workers in all creative disciplines and from every region of Canada.

[*Translation*]

It was an honour to listen to their concerns and to work with them on developing this platform for a better understanding of their work and their value for Canada. This will be the foundation for developing the necessary policies for the arts, museums and performance halls, art galleries, workshops, publishing houses and more.

[*English*]

To the more than 600 people involved in my consultations, all of whom made poignant and insightful contributions to this declaration, I thank you.

Colleagues, as you know, these focus groups, meetings and interviews included individuals of all ages, from high school to those in their nineties; all art forms and sizes of organizations; Indigenous, Black, immigrant, non-Indigenous, disabled, francophone and anglophone people from every part of Canada — east, central, west, north, south, in large cities and rural and small communities. The discussions were heartfelt and based on their experiences, training and professions.

The conclusions embedded in this declaration cut to the chase as to the integral roles and impacts of the arts to Canadian society while emphasizing the critical needs of the sector — especially those needs to improve the often pitiful incomes of those involved.

I also want to thank the witnesses who appeared before the Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee for their contributions to the whole. Their knowledge and passion and their expertise in and commitment to their work was of great help in coming to the unanimous conclusions we did.

[*Translation*]

To my colleagues who are members of the committee, thank you. Your interest, your questions and your sincere and profound perspectives have improved this declaration. I unreservedly support the amendments that further clarify the details of the original scope of this bill. Thank you for improving it.

[*English*]

Colleagues, as you know, this declaration, with its 10 points and implementation strategies, is intended to be the platform for much-needed policy revisions, updates and parameters for the creative sector in this country, which is the third-largest employer in our nation and yet one whose creators comprise the largest percentage of workers living below the poverty line. May it assist in addressing these realities and make the sector not only better within but increase its ability to serve every part of contemporary life in Canada.

As senators, we all know how intrinsic creative expression is to our whole and its truly positive impacts to our health and well-being, crime prevention, reduction in recidivism rates, employment, economy, tourism, Canada's international perceptions and standing, the environment, rural sustainability and, of course, our knowledge of who we are.

Indeed, the work and outcomes of every ministry are impacted.

It is trite, perhaps, to repeat that our artists portray who we are — our places, our ideas and our issues — but it is necessary to do so if we are to move the perception of the arts from frill to its rightful place as an anchor in our society. As former senator Murray Sinclair has said, and as I have quoted a number of times in various publications and, indeed, yesterday in this chamber, that art validates culture. At a time of working towards reconciliation, many of the necessary reconciliATIONS are indeed culturally based.

[*Translation*]

I hope that this declaration will help Canadian society take these steps. The same goes for francophone, Black and immigrant communities, as set out in the amendments unanimously adopted by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

[*English*]

Alberta and B.C. artist Maxwell Bates wrote in 1962 of his own work:

I am an artist, who, for forty years,
Has stood at the lake edge,
Throwing stones in the lake
Sometimes, very faintly,
I hear a splash.

His splash was far greater than he realized and so too is the splash of Canada's artists and arts organizations in all dimensions of all sizes. I hope this bill — this declaration — will be at least a faint splash in furthering the understanding and needs of the work and contributions of this insightful, innovative sector as it weaves all aspects of society together and leads us to a better place.

[Translation]

Senator Cormier described the complexity of the creative sector, and I agree. It is even more complex when it comes to museums and historical art. However, as I've said in this place, artists tell us so poignantly who we are, what we must cherish and what we must address as a society. As so many philosophers have affirmed, the arts nourish our souls, much like bread nourishes the body.

[English]

Parliamentary Poet Laureate Louise Halfe, an Indigenous poet from Saskatchewan, wrote two poems about the roots and needs of artists, indeed the underlying the purpose of this declaration. I asked her for one, and she came with two. The first one is called *For Your Pleasure*:

Black tie, evening gowns
 blue jeans, funky dresses
 people a line for the symphony,
 theatre, a rock concert
 or Leonard Cohen.
 They stroll through a museum
 view beadwork, paintings,
 watch historical documents.
 Walk from painting to painting
 stall to stall at artisan sale.
 Sit in awed silence
 the cat ballerinas on stage
 tap their feet at a fiddle dance,
 admire colorful regalia and
 chant with the pow-wow drums.
 Their commissioned sculptures
 command a street corner,
 choirs at the symphony
 commemorate veterans.
 A tapestry of Canada Geese
 feed in the prairie fields.
 One of the group of seven
 in a medical building.
 Artists.
 Working as waitresses,
 ushers, bus or cab drivers,
 shovel barn manure. Others
 are lucky enough to have a spouse
 to pay their rent.
 The muse nibbles and nudges
 their fingers
 guides them
 to a coffee shop, a studio,
 to listen to the urge
 to leave to you

a re-creation
 of life.

She also wrote *A Celebration of the Arts*:

Poets, dancers, musicians, singers,
 painters, paupers beg
 on bleeding knees
 at the foot of dreams. The muse
 watches as the artists
 push thigh deep through the
 wingless angels in
 a winter storms. In summer rains
 they part the mist-filled fog
 cup the tears of creativity.
 Paupers living in squalor,
 church basements,
 taking refuge in libraries
 to keep their bodies warm.
 Work for pennies
 to pay rent, buy macaroni,
 sell their bodies, a few pieces of art,
 words of poetry they recite
 to four people.
 Paupers unable to pay
 for prescriptions, dental work,
 glasses. Shop at the Sally Ann,
 line up at the food banks.
 There is no bank account, life
 savings. No insurance. Bus pass.
 If the paperwork for mingy grants
 passes the muster of critical eyes
 and serious competition
 mouths will be fed.
 Darkness is invasive
 Consumes the heart with drugs,
 alcohol binges and yet
 the artists' muse hangs on walls, dances
 in theatres, sings on stage,
 collects on shelves
 while they feed on the leftovers.
 People pass the busker's
 guitar, violin, or harmonica.
 Making a living on finger bones.

Colleagues, I ask you to support the third reading of this bill and send it to the House of Commons quickly so their deliberations can begin and hopefully result in recognizing the value and importance of this sector. I ask you to remember my late husband's mantra, which was, "We are all better off when we are all better off." Canada's artists and creative expression do make us better off, and they have the capacity to do so even more with the recognition this bill gives.

[Translation]

I again thank you for your attention and your support. Based on what I have heard from people on the ground all across the country, there is considerable enthusiasm about this Senate initiative with Bill S-208. I know that they will be truly grateful once the bill comes into force. Thank you.