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THE LATE DONALD CREIGHTON RAE SOBEY, O.C.

Statement by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, Canada lost a treasure with the passing of Donald Sobey on March 24. A distinguished businessman, this son of the Sobey's founder was the long-time president and, later, chair of the parent company. Don was also a truly generous philanthropist to the arts, to education, research and community. His reach was national in both business and the arts. I had the great privilege of serving on the board of directors of the National Gallery of Canada while Don Sobey was its chair, a post he held from 2002 to 2008. Art and culture were at the core of his values.

His art knowledge was deep. His love of the developing collection, exhibitions and particularly the work of young artists was palpable. His leadership and management skills were equally evident as he was ever prescient about the whole institution — its people, programs, building and financial health. He was instrumental in acquiring works by the inaugural Sobey Art Award winner Brian Jungen, painter Peter Doig, and sculptor Louise Bourgeois, and public works like Michel de Broin's sculpture *Majestic* and Joe Fafard's *Running Horses*.

The Bourgeois and Fafard are outside the National Gallery for all to see. Don Sobey's was a warm and firm hand and a truly gentle soul.

Don started the all-important annual Sobey awards in 2002 for young contemporary artists, awards that have launched many artists' careers since. Given COVID, he spread last year's award equally among all the finalists. This year, the award has been extended beyond its initial 40-year-old age limit to embrace all emerging artists, and the prize has increased in value to more than \$400,000, "making it the largest purse of any international art prize" as reported by *The Art Newspaper*.

It was a real treat to be in the Sobey's home and see their private collection. I will always remember the individual works and how they were hung — stunning. His eye was impeccable. We talked art, his acquisitions and the international exhibitions he saw, frequently sharing thoughts of London's exhibitions, particularly Peter Doig's.

Research, education and community were key to Don, too, Dalhousie, Queen's, and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia being only a few institutions to benefit from his wisdom, philanthropy and interest. On behalf of artists and organizations across Canada, I extend my sincere condolences to his wife, Beth, and to his family. Those smiling, insightful eyes and his genuine interest in the creative and natural world around him will be much missed. Thank you.
