



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## **PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT (BILL S-234)**

**BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—  
DEBATE CONTINUED**

Speech by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, March 9, 2017

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### PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—  
DEBATE CONTINUED

**Hon. Patricia Bovey:** Honourable senators, I rise today as sponsor and in support of the bill, Bill S-234, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Artist Laureate). This bill was brought forward by our former colleague Senator Moore to create a visual artist laureate on Parliament Hill in the same spirit and with the same reasoning as our poet laureate.

You have already heard me talk about the visual arts being an international language, giving non-verbal expression to the soul and substance of who we are as Canadians. A visual artist laureate on the Hill will bring the public perspective of Parliament, the importance of our democracy today, and the issues and work of parliamentarians to the fore for every Canadian in ways that will communicate to all: to life-long and new Canadians, and immigrants and refugees, regardless of their mother tongue.

As Senator Moore said at second reading, a visual artist laureate is quite different from the Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts. A Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts is a \$25,000 prize, and eight are awarded annually. Each year, the Governor General winners have a group exhibition, usually at the National Gallery of Canada. This year, it is at the Winnipeg Art Gallery opening on April 7.

The word "laureate," which comes from Middle English, denotes a person honoured for distinction in a particular field. A visual artist laureate would be a creative posting for two years, gained through a competitive process. The position would serve both as an arts ambassador and as creator of work related to Parliament Hill and the issues parliamentarians are discussing. An honorarium and materials budget would be paid, and in some jurisdictions, artist laureates are also afforded solo exhibitions. This, I hope, would be the case here.

Many states, including New York, South Dakota and New Hampshire, have visual artist laureates. Australia and the U.K. have children's laureates, Leigh Hobbs and Chris Riddell, respectively.

Named in 2015 for two years, Riddell incorporates the power of the visual in his role. He does daily online illustrations saying, "I want to show how much fun you can have drawing." I can assure you that he is certainly increasing the enjoyment of reading for many young British children, my grandchildren included.

While Parliament has never had a visual artist laureate, Canada is not without precedent in having visual artist laureates in various jurisdictions. Indigenous artist Christi Belcourt received the Ontario Arts Council's Aboriginal Arts Award Laureate in 2014.

Last year, the City of Toronto appointed Geoffrey James as that city's first photography laureate, Toronto's ambassador for the visual and photographic arts, to champion, promote and attract people to photography and visual arts, to attend public

events, engage in discussions of contemporary issues, and to create a unique legacy project. His is a three-year appointment, with an annual \$10,000 honorarium. On the announcement of the appointment, the mayor said:

Photography is a powerful way to tell Toronto's story — to show our city's diversity, talent and beauty.

[*Translation*]

That would certainly be the case for a parliamentary artist laureate, no matter whether the medium was painting, printing, sculpture, drawing, video, film, installation or photography.

Honourable senators, Bill S-234 would amend the Parliament of Canada Act to create the position of parliamentary artist laureate. The artist laureate would be an officer of the Library of Parliament, just like the Parliamentary Budget Officer and other officers of Parliament, in order to ensure his independence.

[*English*]

As drafted, the Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons shall select the artist laureate from a list of three names provided by a committee, chaired by the parliamentary librarian. As currently stated, the committee would include the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages, the Chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, and the President of the Society of Canadian Artists. I would propose the Director of the National Gallery, rather than the librarian and archivist, the CEO, not the chair, of the Canada Council for the Arts, and that the Chair of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts be considered as well.

[*Translation*]

The artist laureate would serve the speakers of the two chambers for no more than two years and would be mandated to promote the arts in Canada through Parliament. He would produce or cause to be produced artistic creations. At the request of either Speaker, he would produce works for the use of Parliament or even for ceremonies of state. The artist laureate could also sponsor artistic events and give advice to the Parliamentary Librarian regarding the Library of Parliament's collection and acquisitions to enrich cultural holdings. In addition, at the request of either Speaker, the incumbent could carry out related duties.

[*English*]

What would the benefits be to Canadians? The portrayal and communication to Canadians of the work of Parliament and our national issues. 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.

Simon Brault, Canada Council for the Arts 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.

In the all-party parliamentary report of 18 years ago, *A Sense of Place — A Sense of Being*, it was said that, "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."

That, colleagues, would be the role of a visual artist laureate — to mirror and interpret the work of Parliament, the issues on which we deliberate, and to reflect on what is seen, heard and perceived, consciously and unconsciously.

I am also truly concerned about the lack of understanding our children and youth have about the role of democracy, the workings of Parliament, and the consequential low rates of youthful voters. The work of a visual artist laureate can help address that gap in the knowledge of civics.

I think the work of our visual artist laureate would be inspiring to all, opening new doors for youth and connecting with new Canadians, and all citizens in every region. This will be a way to bring us to each other, and most importantly a way to bring new understandings of civics, government issues and processes. This international language of visual arts is one that children and youth use all the time.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of our country, the City of Victoria in British Columbia plans on having two artists in residence and one will be an indigenous artist, in order to recognize that this year's celebrations also have a theme of reconciliation.

[English]

As Victoria councillors commented, this artist "will speak very directly to the work we'll be undertaking in the next year or two, three, four or five years in response to the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations," and that "Indigenous art is . . . distinct and significant . . . with real cultural significance rooted in this place . . . it's appropriate to have this position alongside the general artist in residence."

Victoria's budget for each of these two positions was initially planned at \$72,000; \$40,000 for their fee and \$32,000 for expenses. Our poet laureate budget in 2016 was \$33,000, of which \$20,000 was the fee and the balance travel and expenses. A visual artist would also require materials.

As you have heard me say, there are also truly compelling economic statistics from Canada's cultural industries. Statistics Canada published Canadian Culture Satellite Account, which details the "measures of the economic importance of culture (inclusive of the arts and heritage) and sport in Canada in terms of output, gross domestic product and employment."

I think 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 2010 was \$47.6 billion, constituting 3.4 per cent of Canada's GDP. Cultural industries accounted for 642,486 jobs in Canada, 4 per cent of the total in our economy, being our third largest employer. Further, Canada's cultural GDP rose by 2.8 per cent in 2014, audiovisual and interactive media accounting for more than half of the overall growth.

I encourage you all to review your individual provincial cultural impacts. They are truly impressive, ranging from \$121 million to P.E.I.'s GDP, to \$53 million for Nunavut, \$1.4 billion in Manitoba, \$21.8 billion in Ontario and \$10.8 billion in Quebec.

Last week, I spoke at a school on the future needs of social responsibility as they reassessed their strategic plan looking to future needs of students in this rapidly changing world. You can guess my underlying message. 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.

Colleagues, we have the honour of George Elliott Clarke as our seventh, current and inspiring Poet Laureate. We heard his work yesterday. We heard it earlier today.

Not knowing he would be quoted by our two honourable senators, I asked him to write a poem for me today on the visions of a visual artist laureate. He did, and he also gave me a statement. I'm going to read the statement first:

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.

Senators, you can see that I feel this position is one of inspiration, drawing us all together with a dream. Through the visual arts, we can engage and encourage debate on and off the Hill, linking the work of parliamentarians with ordinary Canadians who may not live on Parliament Hill. It will bring Canadians a new understanding of civics.

What better time to give to Canadians a parliamentary artist laureate than Canada's 150th anniversary? As we look back on the last 150 years of our very special nation, we are reminded of the many great artists past who portrayed Canada in multiple visual media. I would be happy to show you whatever examples of our national treasures you would like. Canada is truly a tapestry

of many peoples and cultures who call this place home, and our story is being 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 a parliamentary artist laureate should be created to shine the proper light on Canada's Parliament and our artists and their works, in the spirit of not only explaining the Canadian experience abroad but to ourselves as well. As 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."

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