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THE SENATE

MOTION TO STRIKE A SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE ARCTIC—DEBATE CONTINUED

Speech by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

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MOTION TO STRIKE A SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE ARCTIC—DEBATE CONTINUED

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I would like to thank Senator Omidvar for giving me the opportunity to speak to this measure before she does.

Honourable senators, on this National Aboriginal Day, I rise in support of a special committee on the Arctic to consider the significant and rapid changes to the Arctic and impacts on original inhabitants. The issues are wide, multi-dimensional and the need great. While individually they may relate to specific Senate committees, from my perspective, I think it is important to take time to look at the North through one lens to give a wider context as to their interrelationships, enabling deeper investigations.

Senator Watt and Senator Patterson have spoken eloquently about the changing circumstances in the North and I support their initiative, concerns and passion. Though I am not from the North, I have many personal and professional connections to the North and feel strongly that the complexities and issues that the North is facing must be defined and addressed.

As senators, we are responsible for the minorities within our country, and there are many in the North, including the Inuit of Holman Island, Cape Dorset, Rankin Inlet, Baker Lake, Labrador, Northern Quebec, to mention only some, and of course the Cree and the Dene. We need a sense of the full scope of the issues affecting the life and cultures of Canada's northern peoples in order to develop a framework to seek strategic solutions to these critical problems. Issues include those of sovereignty, food security and cost, natural resources, climate change and the effects of melting sea ice, and the impacts on living standards.

The circumpolar links are important and as evidenced with the relationship between Canada's Inuit peoples and the Sami of the Scandinavian countries, and the relationships between universities in the circumpolar areas and circumpolar studies. Canada is very much part of all these issues and initiatives. We must get a greater understanding of the concerns, not only of the North but for the North.

Climate change is a particularly critical threat, causing alarming changes to the ecology and habitat with the decreasing levels of sea ice and, in turn, the opening of the Northwest Passage, access to oil, creating international claims to the North, lengthening the shipping season and opening the North to large cruise vessels.

Every day, newspaper headlines around the world warn us about the potential impacts of global warming on our climate. Canada's polar regions have been widely predicted to be the first and most severely affected. Continuing scientific research is needed to improve our knowledge and understanding of the challenges of global warming.

How are climate, oceanic and atmospheric changes related to different levels of sea ice in the Arctic? How would changes in this relationship affect marine ecosystems?

We need better tools to predict and curve the harmful effects of the variability and change in the Arctic climate, and that is precisely what combined teams have been undertaking. Canada Research Chair in Arctic-System Science at the University of Manitoba, Dr. David Barber, has been leading this research for a number of years, though this year sea ice conditions have curtailed the 2017 explorations.

This work is expanding scientific knowledge about both the physical and biological processes in the ocean-sea ice-atmosphere system, and is developing innovative modelling tools to predict changes in the system both in space and over time. They are sharing all their discoveries with key stakeholders, Aboriginal peoples of the Arctic and private sector industry. This groundbreaking work is shedding light on how changes in these systems affect the quality and sustainability of the environment and in turn the quality of life. They are collaborating with Aboriginal organizations in collecting, analyzing and integrating data from locations across the Arctic, and the findings of Barber's team are valuable in predicting harmful effects and thus managing the Arctic and consequently our planet.

I think it would be advantageous to learn directly from Dr. Barber how his interdisciplinary team is approaching the scientific realities and impacts on the environment, flora and fauna and livelihoods of those in the North.

The economy of the North has shifted exponentially over the decades, with oil, diamond mines and mineral extraction attracting international interests and investments, and providing jobs. Yet, traditional lifestyles have been compromised and these shifts have been cataclysmic. The suicide rates are alarmingly high, living conditions are far below Canadian standards, with a serious lack of running water, small uninsulated houses, lack of educational opportunities and recreational resources, and of course health being a major concern.

The issue of northern security has been addressed by both Senator Watt and Senator Patterson in this chamber. We know with the opening of the Northwest Passage that many nations are lining up with claims and many countries including Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, the U.S., Norway, Denmark and more have also increased their capabilities to monitor the region.

With cruise ships now going through the Northwest Passage — one last year, two this year — there are further strains on the economy, community and ecology. Can you imagine 4,500 people disembarking in a tiny community? I understand many porta potties were delivered to the North last summer; that all the available fish were purchased by tourists; that the tourists were told not to buy local crafts or art using fur, bone or ivory and, indeed, they were told not to eat while on land.

While that advice was realistic given food supplies in the region, and the international laws prohibiting the import of fur and bone into many countries, one has to wonder if the impact on the

community was positive or negative. I know that the Canadian Border Services Agency has planned to have extra staff arrive from the south for the arrival of these ships this summer, and some have told me that they are scheduled to stay there at least until mid-September.

There has also been very real positive international interest in the art of our Inuit peoples: their sculpture, prints, drawings, textiles and paintings. Their work has been collected by private collectors and by corporations and public galleries since the 1950s, though recently, unfortunately, the international collecting levels have fallen off, creating yet another economic issue for the North. As Senator Moncion so aptly highlighted in her initial speech to this chamber, the Inuit Co-operative movement was strong and important.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Inuit Art Foundation, whose work has been truly impactful to the artists and cooperatives alike, with the 2017 summer issue of the *Inuit Art Quarterly* noting that the work of Inuit artists, historical and contemporary, has “travelled the globe.” Janet Kigusiug’s work, for instance, is “a potent reminder of how we can unite in our shared resistance for sovereignty over our land, resources and culture.” And the recently deceased Annie Pootoogook’s work viscerally portrayed the alarming social crises in the North.

The role of artists in documenting life and changes in the North is very important, as it is for understanding Northern life. I have to say again that their works, contemporary and historical, have added significantly to the annals of Canadian art, portraying myths, lifestyles and place.

I have spoken, too, to the issues of fresh food and food security before, both with regard to access and cost. This is a critical issue. In Churchill and throughout the northern regions, why does it cost so much more in the North? Why is alcohol so much less expensive than milk and juice? Why are the health concerns so much greater than in the south?

Senators, the issues that face the Arctic touch on almost all of our Senate standing committees. Aboriginal Peoples; Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources; National Security and Defence; Social Affairs, Science and Technology; Foreign Affairs and International Trade; Transport and Communications; and Fisheries and Oceans — all study the Arctic and its challenges in some way.

All of these committees do exceptional work, but a special committee to take all of the issues at hand and examine them through the lens of those who actually inhabit the land would be beneficial to our work here in this chamber.

As a house that is tasked with representing the regions of this country, we should keep in mind that the Canadian Arctic composes forty per cent of Canada’s total land mass, a vast land that is deserving of special attention.

Special Senate Committees have provided some very useful studies in the past, from anti-terrorist legislation to aging, health care and Senator Nolin’s cannabis report. We are currently in the midst of a special committee study on modernization, which is doing a thorough job addressing that topic.

For those senators worried about duplication or the committee overstepping its mandate, I would stress that the rules are quite explicit regarding this: Once the parameters of a special committee are established, permission to stray from those must be granted by the Senate.

I agree with Senator Watt that we are entering a pivotal moment in the history of Canada’s Arctic. Climate change has caused, and will continue to cause, a sea change to life in the Arctic and, indeed, to the whole planet. It is with this in mind that I support Senator Watt’s proposal; a special committee on the Arctic would be a timely and responsible use of the resources of the Senate.
