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SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE CONTINUED

Speech by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, November 19, 2020

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[Translation]

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MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE CONTINUED

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, we all aspire to build a stronger and more resilient Canada, and we all have ideas on how to get there. I am honoured to add my thoughts on how to create a better place for everyone and the challenges of doing so, especially during this pandemic.

[English]

In the Throne Speech, the Governor General spoke of the immense debt we owe to those who served and still serve on the front lines. We all agree. We are also in debt to artists as they have lifted our spirits, giving diversion to our fears and concerns. Through their creativity we have hope and can focus on the future. They have also depicted our history. From our history comes our strength, a path to a more just society, to one of reconciliation and to correcting past mistakes and omissions of inclusion in telling our history.

Over the pandemic months, I consistently reached out to artists, arts leaders and workers. I applaud their creativity, innovation and commitment. Arts leaders have steered a difficult course during the pandemic while their lives and programs, too, have been turned upside down.

Stable leadership is critical now, as seen in organizations in my province, like the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, the Manitoba Opera, the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Prairie Theatre Exchange, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Manitoba Museum and more.

I am proud of these arts professionals as they transitioned to successful digital programming and fundraising. They know their communities and organizations inside out.

In addition to creative digital outreach, they have been supportive and sensitive to their staff, artists and audiences' needs, steering their organizations with compassion, pragmatism and hope. I trust volunteer boards across Canada to support that essential need for stability and sensitivity. We must collectively stem as much talent bleed as possible. When the world opens up, Canada's creative foundations must be strong.

[Translation]

For us, this has been premised on a knowledge-based economy for several years now. I remember well all of the work we did in the 1980s to identify what was needed to unleash the full potential of our knowledge-based economy and what we, as institutional leaders, had to do to make us stronger. The Speech from the Throne highlighted how important the knowledge-based economy is.

Our society has posed questions about such topics as climate change, environmental protections, health care, persons with disabilities, the economy, equality, education and connectivity from coast to coast. The creative sector connects all of these elements, much like it does with our Canadian values. I thank the unofficial task force on COVID-19 and the arts, made up of senators from three groups in this place, for having spent several months studying the impact of COVID-19 on the arts and artists, as well as on artistic organizations and communities.

What specific challenges does the arts sector face in society as a whole, and how is it meeting these challenges? What does society need to do, and what does the government need to promote?

[English]

Let's start with climate change, which overshadows so many issues today, from the weather worldwide to our own Arctic, the changes in nature, housing, food, transportation and much more. Climate change, environmental issues and societal needs are inextricably linked, fully integrated and cannot be separated. I believe one reason that there is a lack of understanding of this crisis is because we have allowed ourselves to be siloed.

To that end, I think museums can and must assume a significant role in climate change with their own footprint and in enlightening audiences in reality, including science, human consequences and necessary viable shifts in human patterns. Museums have the knowledge, the collections and the public trust to be able to step outside traditional boxes and thus play an impactful key role, standing up for the greater principle for all.

To do that, museums and galleries must take more risk. The arts are good business stewards, always with an eye on the bottom line and audience numbers. Those critical goals have led to the increasing frequency of blockbuster exhibitions. While important, they, at times, have diverted attention from our history, place and art. The 2019 mandate letter tasked the Minister of Canadian Heritage to develop a museums policy for Canada. As necessary principles, guidelines and values are defined, I hope active consideration will be given to allowing boards and staff to take risks in exploring difficult and challenging subjects that will contribute to constructive long-term societal change and dialogue.

Immediate audience satisfaction should not be the only goal. Expanding awareness and educating us all must be primary. That is one of the four key mandates of any museum and gallery.

[Translation]

To make the link to Canada's key environmental targets, I was pleased that Bill C-55, which sought to increase the proportion of Canada's marine areas that are protected, was passed. I'm impressed by the Arctic exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Nature and also by how artists have been speaking out against environmental problems for decades. For example, we have Sarah Anne Johnson, with her work on tree planting in Manitoba,

the artists who protested the first logging of old-growth forest in the Carmanah Valley in the 1980s, and even Emily Carr with her paintings in the late 1930s and early 1940s, including *Logged-over Hillside*. The objective of protecting one quarter of our territory and oceans over the next five years is critical. Museums must play a leading role in this regard and contribute to this initiative with their knowledge and their collections attesting to recent and age-old changes observed in nature.

Health is also inextricably tied to the arts. I have often spoken in this chamber of the positive effects of the arts on people's health and so I will not rhyme off the statistics again. However, I invite the arts and culture sector to continue to present works, given the number of illnesses and conditions afflicting Canadians and the current medical crisis.

[English]

The Governor General highlighted after-school programs, training and education. While new initiatives are needed in these pandemic times, many successful programs urgently require support to meet their growing demand, like Winnipeg's Art City, the inner-city after-school program attended by children of all diversities. Sistema programs are also making impressive gains in the confidence, health and well-being of children and families. Through music, Senator Woo's daughter Naomi Woo, leader of Sistema Winnipeg, is improving the lives of inner-city youth.

The mentorships, internships and work experience programs offered by universities, colleges and organizations, like Manitoba's MAWA, or Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, are paramount. So too are the Canadian Senior Artists' Resource Network's mentorships. During the past six years, CSARN has been meeting their goal of bridging "generational, cultural and geographical gaps through a virtual and in-person Mentoring Program . . ." Without any federal funding, they match senior, experienced artists and arts administrators with emerging talents. Their impact is palpable, yet they are unable to meet current needs. Now could well be the right time for the federal government to develop a pilot project on the effectiveness and benefits of paid mentorships.

With regard to reconciliation, I believe "reconciliations" are paramount too, by non-Indigenous and Indigenous Canadians, and I would like to thank CIBA for supporting a process of equitable representation and Senate installations of Indigenous art. This is one small but important step.

Reinvigorating tourism was also mentioned, and we would not have a strong tourism sector without Canada's arts, culture, museums, festivals and performing arts presented in myriad places. A healthy restart of our tourism industry depends on a healthy arts and culture sector. Remember, the arts account for more than 22% of Toronto's hotel rooms each year.

The government reported in 2016 that tourism represented 2% of our GDP, with 1 in 11 Canadian jobs — more than 1.7 million — depending on the tourist economy. Tourism is the number one employer of youth and an important employer of new Canadians. The amount raised from international tourism revenue was \$20 billion, and from domestic tourism, \$72 billion.

Tourism unquestionably builds people-to-people connections, supports cultural exchanges and helps Canadians and others globally understand each other.

I have concerns about CBC and digital presentations, which I will talk about another time. I'm going to cut to the chase with this one and say that internet platforms must be regulated since they are not currently considered broadcast media. Internet platforms should be part of the Status of the Artist legislation and required to pay artists. I am concerned by the number of artists who are making their own productions with their own equipment and putting them on non-paying platforms just to get their work out.

I was pleased with the announcement of the Canadian Independent Screen Fund for Black and people of colour creators to provide money for targeted investments, which should increase job opportunities and have a positive economic ripple among racialized communities.

Next year's Canadian Venice Biennale participant will be Vancouver Black artist Stan Douglas. And on December 10, our filmmaker Deepa Mehta will be premiering her stunning and moving film *Funny Boy*. Colleagues, our cultural diplomacy is and must continue to be alive. Its importance must be understood and supported, as per the Senate report of 2019, *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy*.

[Translation]

That said, where are we now? The government's pandemic response during the first wave was necessary and still is. However, I continue to worry about those left behind. Were arts organizations consulted to establish eligibility criteria for assistance in the second wave, as the Minister of Finance promised?

How will arts organizations survive if donations are less than projected for 2020 and if their audience is limited to 25% or 30% capacity after they re-open?

[English]

Those of us appointed to the chamber under the "new" system had an intense application process, addressing our career values and accomplishments in relationship to Senate and Canadian values. These collective values, honourable colleagues, are reflected in the issues we face during this pandemic.

I'm going to conclude with a short poem by artist Maxwell Bates, which he wrote in 1962:

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.

Colleagues, I hope we hear the multiple splashes of concern. If I have any overriding message at all as I reflect on the Throne Speech, it is to listen to the voices of artists who poignantly express who we are, what we must cherish and what we must address as a society. Thank you.