



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 43rd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 151 • NUMBER 7

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—
DEBATE ADJOURNED

Speech by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill S-210, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate). First introduced in 2016, this bill was passed unanimously by this chamber on May 8, 2018. Unfortunately, the then Bill S-234, died on the Order Paper in the other place. May we be more successful in the other place this time around. This is a good bill that I believe would add to Parliament's ability to reach out to Canadians across our country through the visual arts.

This bill establishes the position of the visual artist laureate as an officer of the Library of Parliament, providing independence from Parliament, like other officers of the Library such as the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Bill S-210 provides that the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons, acting together, shall select the visual artist laureate from a list of three names, reflecting Canada's diversity, submitted confidentially by a committee composed of the Director of the National Gallery of Canada, the Commissioner of Official Languages for Canada, the Chairperson of the Canada Council for the Arts, the President of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, or their designates. The Chair of the Committee of Selection would be the Parliamentary Librarian.

Like the Poet Laureate, the parliamentary visual artist laureate's term will be two years, serving at the pleasure of the Speakers of the Senate and the other place. The mandate of the parliamentary visual artist laureate is to promote the arts in Canada through Parliament by fostering knowledge, enjoyment, awareness and development of the arts.

[*Translation*]

The bill defines the powers of the parliamentary visual artist laureate, including the following: produce or cause to be produced artistic creations, especially for use in Parliament on occasions of state; sponsor artistic events, including art exhibitions; give advice to the Parliamentary Librarian regarding the collection of the Library and acquisitions to enrich its cultural holdings; perform such other related duties as are requested by either Speaker or the Parliamentary Librarian.

[*English*]

Also included in Bill S-210 is a definition of the visual arts, which includes drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts, photography, videography and filmmaking.

Colleagues, that is the “how” and the “what” of creating the parliamentary visual artist laureate. The “why” is something I have spent my career working on. As you well know, the arts are near and dear to me, as I believe they are for many senators in this chamber today.

The previous bill garnered significant, solid and palpable support across this country. While Canada has not had a parliamentary visual artist laureate, there are precedents. Many states, some Canadian cities — including Toronto and Victoria — and some countries have visual artist laureates. A recent U.K. Children's Laureate, Chris Riddell, incorporated the power of the visual into his work by doing daily online illustrations and said, “I want to show how much fun you can have with drawing.” I witnessed the huge positive impact of his work and the increased reading abilities of children.

Indigenous artist Christi Belcourt received the 2014 Ontario Arts Council's Aboriginal Arts Award Laureate. Internationally highly-esteemed Canadian artist Geoffrey James became Toronto's first photography laureate. As the city's ambassador for the visual and photographic arts, he championed photography and the visual arts, engaged in discussions of contemporary issues and thus created a unique legacy project.

We know from many studies and commentaries that “the arts are the most powerful tool we have for social change.” As we deal with issues of poverty, race discrimination, crime prevention, reconciliation, health and more, we need those tools more than ever before.

[*Translation*]

Art is widely recognized as a lever for social and cultural change. The work artists do reflects society. It leads people to think about many issues, as we do in the Senate, by challenging, exploring and presenting social problems, often long before society recognizes them.

I think that by visually presenting what is going on in both chambers of Parliament, we will be encouraging our young people to engage as well as helping them gain a better understanding of civil society and our democratic and bicameral system. I also believe that the work of a visual artist laureate will inspire us all and open new doors to countless refugees, new Canadians and citizens across the country.

[*English*]

Honourable senators, art is integral to every aspect of our society. It portrays humanity and defines who we are and our regional and societal concerns past, present and future. Through art, we engage people of all diversities and ages with acute insights.

[Translation]

Artists are not afraid to articulate society's critical issues and problems. They depict the beauty and fragility of the environment and life all around us. Their works often help us find solutions to contemporary problems. We will truly benefit from having this capacity in Parliament and for Parliament.

In my opinion, society has not yet developed a true understanding of the major impact of the arts on all aspects of contemporary life. Our parameters for measuring the impact and meaning of art are far too narrow and assessed far too quickly.

[English]

My research over the past 15 years and more has focused on the societal concerns defined by politicians of all stripes and all levels of government and the role — or roles — the arts play in each. My research, both empirical and anecdotal, has unequivocally shown that the arts are essential in solving or even addressing each of these. The basic facts about the arts' indispensable contribution to our society are compelling. As John Ralston Saul said, "Culture is the motor of any successful society."

The arts are the third-largest employer in Canada, making up 3.3 per cent of our workforce — double the number in forestry and more than double the number in banks; 609,000 work in the cultural sector to 135,000 in the automobile industry. That is an impressive — and little known — fact. The arts industries contribute about 7.4 per cent of the country's GDP and pay in taxes — in total, to all levels of government — more than three times the \$7.9 billion the three levels of government paid directly on culture in 2007.

Health statistics are equally compelling. International studies have proven that people who engage in the live arts live, on average, two years longer and have better health. They cost the health system less and, post elective surgery, tend to be discharged from hospital one or two days sooner. They also miss less work. Just think how a visual artist laureate could present our concerns in these areas.

Multiple studies have proven that the arts, in school and extracurricularly, improve educational outcomes at all levels and the crime prevention statistics are overwhelming, particularly where professional artists work with youth.

In Fort Myers, a creative pilot project focused on vulnerable 11- to 14-year-olds through a theatre, visual art and writing project where professional artists mentored the youths' collaborative production in a safe place, and raised the grades of the students. And since the program's inception, juvenile crime dropped 28 per cent and the rate of recidivism for these 11- to 14-year-olds dropped 64 per cent.

The arts have a positive impact on rural revival too. Powell River's international choral festival, the Aurora Winter Festival and many other examples have given new life and business to shrinking communities.

Artists also draw attention to environmental issues such as pollution, acid rain and clear cuts, giving voice to the crises as well as visionary resolutions. We are concerned with all of these issues in this chamber.

Lastly in my research, and equally important, was tourism. The contribution of the arts again is truly significant in some of Canada's centres, including Toronto, accounting for more than 22 per cent of all hotel bookings.

Senators, artists have the insight and vision to see and express societal crises long before the rest of society sees them. I have spoken before of Canada's Indigenous artists' work and Joane Cardinal-Schubert's 1990s art installation "The Lesson," her gutsy, clairvoyant and clarion call to the understanding and redress of residential schools, predating the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

And I have talked about Faye HeavyShield's 1985 work "Sisters," its gold, pointed shoes in a circle. Toes, pointing outwards, drew attention to the issues of murdered and missing women — how long before the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Women and Girls was established?

Our Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade studied cultural diplomacy, its impacts and benefits from a 360-degree perspective — the artist, arts organizations, foreign trade, trade missions, business and for projecting Canada's profile abroad. We did so comparatively with what is being done elsewhere. We heard from Canadian and foreign diplomats, funding agencies at home and abroad, the Canada Council, Heritage Canada, artists of all disciplines, educators, academics and more. It is clear that Canada's leading international role is significantly enhanced by the work of artists in all disciplines, their connecting of many international dimensions defining our national values and underlining Canada's profile abroad, both economic and social.

I am pleased our report *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy* has garnered such great support at home and abroad. It was mentioned in several ministerial mandate letters. Training at Global Affairs has begun and important public sessions have taken place.

Visual artists are at the forefront of defining how others see us on the international stage. We should afford these same artists the opportunity to help define who we are to each other at home. We need this understanding between our regions now more than ever before. A visual artist laureate would do just that.

Our former colleague and poet Senator McIntyre touched on a very important point when it comes to creating the position of visual artist laureate. He said in this chamber:

Visual arts have a particular ability to shape the spirit of our society and great nation. Whether the art reflects our present, past or imagination, it is a portrait depicting our lives and history; a powerful way to bring communities from coast to coast to coast together and create a shared vision of ideals, values and hopes for the future.

[*Translation*]

Today, it is important that we, as Canadians from different regions, learn to understand each other. Our experiences and history as individual provinces collectively make Canada a great country. We must understand and appreciate ourselves at every level, for the sake of our future. I believe that a visual artist laureate would enhance this understanding and be helpful to us in these difficult times we are living in.

[*English*]

Senators, the visual arts are an international language giving non-verbal expression to the soul and substance of who we are as Canadians. A visual artist laureate in Parliament will bring the public perspective of Parliament, the important of our democracy today and the issue and works of parliamentarians to the fore for

every Canadian in ways that will communicate to all — to lifelong and new Canadians, immigrants and refugees — regardless of their mother tongue. Creating this position will demonstrate Parliament's leadership in underlining the importance of the arts and significant contributions they make to Canada's overall economy. We as parliamentarians obviously have a strong societal responsibility, so too do artists. I look forward to bringing Parliament and artists together in a concrete, meaningful way through the visual artist laureate.

We have an opportunity now to lead and underline the importance of the arts while gaining a new means of bringing our work to the public. I therefore ask for your support once again to make this legislation a reality. I know artists, collectors, galleries and academics from coast to coast and throughout the North were really disappointed when this bill fell off the Order Paper in the other place near the end of the session. I have had many requests that the bill be passed speedily at the beginning of this session. It is needed and much wanted. Let's get this bill back to the other place soon. Thank you.
