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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 mars 2024

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PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

GROUP OF SEVEN DAY ACT, 2024
LOI DE 2024 SUR LE JOUR DU GROUPE
DES SEPT

Mr. Riddell moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 158, An Act to proclaim Group of Seven Day /
Projet de loi 158, Loi proclamant le Jour du Groupe des
Sept.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Pursuant
to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for his
presentation.

Mr. Brian Riddell: It's my honour today to speak this
evening on Bill 158, An Act to proclaim Group of Seven
Day.

Madam Speaker, if this House is in agreement with my
bill that we proclaim the Group of Seven Day be declared
on the seventh day of July, this date will acknowledge and
celebrate the group's contributions to the historical culture
of our province and our country. The annual occasion will
be led provincially by the McMichael gallery and the Art
Gallery of Ontario, and promoted by Destination Ontario.
In addition, several Ontario municipalities with art
galleries or depicted in the Group of Seven's paintings will
also benefit.

As we know, the Group of Seven are internationally
recognized artists from the early part of the 20th century.
Their works, mainly outdoor scenes in Ontario, are
collected and displayed by galleries around the world. The
painters, many of whom are buried at the McMichael
gallery in Kleinburg, are studied by thousands of students
in Ontario and across Canada, including myself.

The Group of Seven, also known as the Algonquin
School, were also known for their paintings inspired by
Canadian landscapes. The group was founded in 1920 as
an organization of self-proclaimed modern artists and
disbanded in 1933. The group originally consisted of
Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank
Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald and Frederick
Varley.

Two artists commonly associated with the group were
Tom Thomson and Emily Carr—probably the two most
famous of the group. Although Thomson passed away
before the group's official formation, he played a signifi-

cant role in the group's success. An essay written by
Lawren Harris, titled *The Story of the Group of Seven*,
described Thomson as being "a part of the movement
before we pinned a label on it." As a matter of fact,
Thomson's paintings *The West Wind* and *The Jack Pine*
are two of the group's most iconic paintings, and my
favourites, personally.

Thomson grew up and is buried in Owen Sound, which
is home to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery. The gallery
features a significant collection of his work, including an
exhibition of small oil sketches, graphics, memorabilia
and archival materials.

Meanwhile, Carr is the namesake behind the Emily
Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, British
Columbia. Originally founded as the Vancouver School of
Decorative and Applied Arts, the school became the
Vancouver School of Arts in 1933, followed by the Emily
Carr College of Art and Design in 1978. Today, the Emily
Carr University is a world leader in art, media and design.
It is ranked as one of the top universities in Canada for art
and design and 24th in the world, believe it or not.

Just as our province has designated many days to hon-
ouring cultural groups, volunteer organizations, holidays
and health awareness campaigns, July 7 will be a day to
celebrate the continued inspiration of the Group of Seven.
Bill 158 aims to do more than just celebrate these treasured
artists and their work. Designating July 7 as Group of
Seven Day will allow Ontario galleries that feature the
works of the Group of Seven to promote their exhibitions
and increase tourism in their communities.

Prominent among the galleries that feature the works of
the Group of Seven is the McMichael gallery in Kleinburg,
where many of these artists are buried and remembered.
Other venues featuring the group's art include the National
Gallery in Ottawa, the Art Gallery of Algoma, the Art
Gallery of Sudbury, the Varley gallery in Markham, the
Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brantford and Brant, the Group
of Seven Outdoor Gallery in Huntsville, and the Tom
Thomson Art Gallery in Owen Sound.

Madam Speaker, festivals and events celebrating these
artists could be held in our parks, our community centres,
along our shorelines and on our streets. It will be a win-
win for local artists, tourism, the economy and the
province of Ontario as a whole. Bill 158, if passed, will
also be a boost to arts and culture in Ontario.

The fourth consideration I'd like members of this
House to be mindful of is the positive impact Bill 158 will
have on the education of our students. The Group of Seven
believed art could be inspired through a connection with
nature. In fact, their paintings of Canadian landscapes led

to the first major art movement in Canada, believe it or not. Members of the Group of Seven travelled extensively to explore the nature that inspired their works.

According to Destination Ontario, northern Ontario served as a backdrop for some of the Group of Seven's most influential paintings. Some of the group's most recognizable work was inspired by the beautiful landscapes of Killarney Provincial Park and Georgian Bay. To quote Destination Ontario:

"The Group of Seven's depictions of Canada's rugged forest came to symbolize Canadian strength and resilience. Their expressionist works were often simple landscapes but stood apart from the rest of their use of bright hues and unique painting style, ultimately inspiring the modern art movement in Canada.

"For 13 years, the hearty artists rode the rails, hitched boat rides, scaled rock faces, hiked backcountry and paddled wild waters to reach the views that inspired their art.

"They camped in the forest, stayed in vacant cabins and lived off the land, often in less than ideal conditions. Their artistic journeys took them wide and far, not only in Ontario but across Canada.

"The Group of Seven's iconic paintings and sketches, located inside the Ontario galleries' walls, is nothing short of spectacular."

Madam Speaker, as a photographer, a professor of creative media with a degree in history and archaeology and a protector of our natural environment, I am intrigued by the story about the Group of Seven and the decades' long influence their work has had on the arts community, in our schools and in galleries across the country, not to mention the world.

I believe that the arts, in all forms, strengthen the fabric of our community and are vital to our growth and inclusiveness.

By designating July 7 as Group of Seven Day, we have a unique opportunity to further promote the arts across our province, educate younger generations about the group's work, and encourage visits to our province's museums.

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To quote Lawren Harris, "No man can roam or inhabit the Canadian north without it affecting him, and the artist, because of his constant habit of awareness and his discipline in expression, is perhaps more understanding of its moods and spirits than others are."

It's worth noting that on September 18, 1970, Canada Post issued the Group of Seven stamp, designed by Allan Robb Fleming and based on a painting, *Isles of Spruce*, by Arthur Lismer. The stamps were sold for six cents—imagine what a stamp is worth today. Later, in June 1995, Canada Post issued 10 additional stamps. And in May 2020, Canada Post honoured the centennial of the group's first exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto by issuing seven stamps featuring paintings of the original members.

In closing, I would like to say that I believe Bill 158 gives us the opportunity to honour these artists of our past by inspiring the artists of our future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I had the pleasure of attending a very special event in Nipigon, Ontario. Nipigon is part of my riding of Thunder Bay–Superior North. At this time, September 19, Ontario's Superior Country, the tourism organization that promotes our region in northwestern Ontario, unveiled the beautiful Copper Thunderbird monument and panel inspired by and dedicated to Indigenous Group of Seven artist Norval Morrisseau. Influenced by his Anishinaabe spirit name, Copper Thunderbird, the monument is a copper-themed thunderbird with various photos of Morrisseau printed within the wings and body, and an interpretative panel which includes information on this monumental artist. This event was quite moving. Many members of Morrisseau's family were there and able to stand proudly with this monument to their father, grandfather or great-grandfather. There were many generations there. Many relatives had not met each other before, so the monument created an opportunity for people to connect and share stories. It was also a significant moment in my own education, because I did not know about the Indigenous Group of Seven until I attended this event.

This group of people gathered informally in the early 1970s and included Jackson Beardy, Eddy Cobiness, Alex Janvier, Norval Morrisseau, Daphne Odjig, Carl Ray and Joseph Sanchez. They came together to collectively fight for the inclusion of their work within the Canadian mainstream and the contemporary art canon. Constantly belittled, Indigenous people were faced with two options: to accept an inferior position or rebel against oppressive conditions. Self-determination and self-definition were at the heart of these artists' motivations. Their works provide a window upon this vision, encouraging us to think about the forces that shape our lives and how we want to shape our future together.

I will say here, I love the works of the Canadian-bred Group of Seven, but I want to do a little compare-and-contrast here.

How did the European-weaned, Canadian-based Group of Seven artists achieve such fame and become the icons of Canadian identity?

These artists were all members of the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto, which was a largely anglophone, white, male-only club devoted to establishing an identity for the "new country" through their work as artists. The insignia of the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto was a "Viking ship with sails full spread before the rising sun ... to remind members of the open sea and the great adventure." What was the great adventure? The adventure of colonization—one taken up with great enthusiasm by members of the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto. So this was an adventure premised on notions of furthering the progress of "the race" and developing an identity for "the nation"—an identity intended to legitimate the larger imperial project and sustain the dominance of white settler society.

I went back to the very first newsletters of the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto and came across an illustrated

version of *O Canada*. This was before it had become our national anthem, but it was the same music. So Calixa Lavallée's music, a rousing military march, is accompanied by the illustration of a European man of great physical stature—Samuel de Champlain, in fact—standing on windswept rocks claiming ownership of the land by staking a massive fleur-de-lys. In the background, two Iroquois men in a canoe are in the process of making themselves absent by anxiously paddling out of the picture.

Here, the artist produces the Iroquois' ghosts vanishing before a superior being, a recasting of history within white imaginative space that denies and represses any memories that might contradict the narrative. And we should remember that no explorer, no early settler, would have survived without the support of the Indigenous peoples who helped them and ultimately traded with them.

Following Confederation in 1867—let's see now; did I just lose a page here? Yes, I did. There was great interest amongst members of the English-speaking arts and letters groups to generate notions of identity that would be considered uniquely Canadian. And around this time we've got the Canada First movement. Actually, that movement comes a bit later—no, we are talking about the Canada First movement; excuse me. The race chauvinism of the movement was reflected in their active roles in inciting anger towards Métis, Catholics and French in Ontario during the Red River Rebellion.

However, the race and gendered identity of the ideal Canadian national was also expressed in the words of Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris, when he describes his hopes and ideals as a Canadian artist. These are Lawren Harris' words:

“It is only through the deep and vital experience of its total environment that a people identifies itself with its land and gradually a deep and satisfying awareness develops. We were convinced that no virile people could remain subservient to, and dependent upon the creations in art of other peoples.... To us, there was also the strange brooding sense of another nature fostering a new race and a new age.”

So the defining idea adopted by the Canada First movement and other like-minded artists, including the Group of Seven, were to really express and create this notion of what is the Canadian character. So the northern imagery, developed primarily by white Canadian artists established several interrelated notions of Canada and Canadian identities.

(1) the Canadian “north” as a vast rugged and empty landscape;

(2) the northern wilderness as a space in which white men prove their mettle by overcoming a harsh and savage wilderness;

(3) Canadians, as members of a northern, Anglo-Saxon race, as physically, psychically and morally superior to those living in southern latitudes, including those living in the United States; and

(4) the purity of the snow-covered landscape as an allegory for the purity and apparent non-violence of the Canadian colonial project.

These images were consciously chosen by artists to create a historical narrative portraying the colonial project as noble and designating as heroic those credited with furthering the nationalist project.

Now, I want to make sure I don't run out of the time here. The same imagery abounds in literature intended to excite British and Canadian boys and men about the adventurous possibilities for achieving manhood in Canada.

Carl Berger offers a long list of phrases found in Canadian literature that link northern imagery with seductive portrayals of race and gendered authority and belonging. I'll just name a few of these:

“Canada was the ‘Britain of the North,’ ‘this northern kingdom,’ the ‘True North’ in Tennyson's phrase, the ‘Lady of the Snows’ in Kipling's. ‘Canada is a young, fair, stalwart maiden of the north.’ ‘The very atmosphere of her northern latitude, the breath of light that rose from lake and forest, prairie and mountain, was fast developing a race of men with bodies enduring as iron and minds as highly tempered as steel’.... ‘Northern nations always excel in energy and stamina, which accounts for their prevailing power.’ In the north, ‘The race is compelled by nature to maintain its robust attributes, mental and physical, whereas in more sunny countries like Africa and Australia the tendency of the climate is towards degeneration.’”

So you can see that there's really a very powerful ideology that has permeated artistic thinking. So there's an absent presence of the Indian, really, because you've got these empty landscapes where you know people have been and they were at the time, but they're not there.

1750

One of the many ironies of the absence of the “Indian” and the iconography of a cold and empty land, for example, is that the pure, cold and rugged northern landscapes that is supposed to produce northern Europeans as self-reliant, hardy and entitled does not apply to the peoples who thrived in the same landscape for millennia.

So let's do a quick comparison of the lives of members of the Canadian-identified Group of Seven and the Indigenous Group of Seven.

The Canadian Group of Seven: highly supported through government grants, socially supported through the Arts and Letters Club and other institutions established to assert what would represent culture in this new place called Canada.

On the other hand, you might have Norval Morrisseau from Sand Point First Nation. Sand Point was dispossessed of its land and they lost their reserve. All the buildings were burnt down. You start to get a sense of the kind of trauma that Norval Morrisseau lived through to create his works. So dispossession, oppression and homelessness on the one side; on the other side, enormous support.

I've got one last thing to say before I pass this on: During the Mike Harris government, public spending on the arts was cut by 35%. Ironically, the article—oops, I'm

not supposed to have props—that talks about those cuts, those cuts include a Norval Morrisseau painting. But we also know that since then, significant cuts have been made to the arts by this government. The Indigenous Culture Fund, for example, was cut in 2018, and of course there were cuts to Indigenous education and cultural programming.

I'm going to stop there because I want to let my colleague finish.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: It is an honour to join the debate on Bill 158, An Act that proposes to proclaim the seventh day of the seventh month in each year Group of Seven Day.

Sir Winston Churchill once remarked—and he's been quoted in this House with respect to this particular quote and with respect to many others—that a nation, a country, a people who forget their history have no future. It is essential that we remember and honour our history: the good and the bad, to learn from it, but to celebrate the good and to teach our children well, as the song goes.

This bill, being Bill 158, is similar to a previous bill tabled in this House in 2023, Bill 78, and it did receive substantial support at second reading. We're at second reading of Bill 158, and I hope and believe that this House will support this concept once again: the idea of the seventh day of the seventh month in honour of the Group of Seven, the iconic Canadian artists.

We have much to celebrate in this great province of Ontario, both our history and our future, and of course throughout Canada; and the landscape renderings in the artistic works of the Group of Seven are second to none. They are truly world-famous. We have the McMichael gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario and many other galleries that display these great works. It's important to engage our young people, our students, in learning about the history of the Group of Seven and welcoming expansions to that group, because we did add to the Group of Seven over the years with Emily Carr, as the member for Cambridge mentioned. Emily Carr was added to that group; she wasn't one of the originals.

And there's room for an Indigenous Group of Seven. Art has no limits. Art when it comes to Ontario and Canada is everybody's business. It's something where we welcome all, and we can absolutely criticize art. There was that old line, as I mentioned, from the Mel Brooks movie "History of the World: Part I," that with the inevitable first artist came the inevitable afterbirth, the art critic. So we can criticize art. We can criticize history. We can say that certain artists might have been influenced by their particular background. It's okay. Let's engage; let's exchange ideas; let's celebrate the good with the bad.

Well, with the Group of Seven, I believe we're celebrating the good: the good of their art, the greatness of their art, the majesty of their art, and also a celebration of Ontario's and Canada's history. Why not, with the seventh day of the seventh month in each year being identified as Group of Seven Day, in the lead-up to that day each year,

engage our students, encourage tours of the McMichael gallery and local art museums across the province? Encourage the students to learn about each and every member of the Group of Seven, to learn about their art, what motivated them, what inspired them, what it teaches us about Ontario and Canada in terms of our history and our future; and, in the process, inspire future artists and historians among those students. That's what it's about. That's what I believe the intent of Bill 158 is about.

A little tidbit, if I may: One of the Group of Seven members, Lawren Harris, was referenced by the member for Cambridge in his remarks to this House this evening, and it's interesting that the Attorney General reminded me the other day—and we have noted this in the House before—that one of his children is named after that Group of Seven artist. One of the Attorney General's children is named Lawren after that particular member of the Group of Seven. That's celebrating history. That's teaching our children well.

And so with that, with my limited time, which I'm sharing with other members, including the member to my right for Collingwood, I will now cede my time.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, I want to talk to you about a gorgeous, 55-metre-high cascade, High Falls, on Onaping River in my riding. This has captured the heart of artist A.Y. Jackson, who made a beautiful painting of it. You can come. There's a park now where you can see a replica of his painting and you can see the actual river and walk beside it. It is a beautiful, beautiful sight, and really gives you this feeling of what A.Y. Jackson was able to do, was able to capture.

The site has changed. The river is the same, with the big cascade. The big rocks are the same. The trees are a whole lot bigger than in the painting, because the painting is over 50 years old. But you will see the way he captured this beautiful, beautiful sight—the talent of this artist, part of the Group of Seven. If you come to Nickel Belt, you go on Highway 144 just past Dowling on the way to Onaping and Levack. It's on the right-hand side. There's a great big sign that says, "Welcome to A.Y. Jackson Lookout." Go and see it. You will be in awe.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Point of order?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House to allow the independents, as a group, to speak for five minutes following the minister's statement on International Women's Day tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from London West has made a request for the unanimous consent of the House. However, we are currently in private members' public business proceedings. By convention, this is not a whipped proceeding, and during this time there is an exception that only the designated business will be considered. Therefore, pursuant to long-standing practice of the House, requests for unanimous consent cannot be considered at this time.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Good try, though.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): It was a good try, though.

I recognize the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to rise today in support of the member from Cambridge's Bill 158, An Act to proclaim Group of Seven Day. I wanted to debate this bill because we're in the process right now of—my mom passed away last year, and we're taking stuff out of the house, making sure everybody has a piece of remembrance. The Red Maple is an icon in most households. It was always in the living room at my parents'—it's still there at my parents' house right now; we haven't moved it—and it means so much to our family. When I look at The Red Maple, it makes me think of our youth and our childhood. We also have Spring Ice, which is by Tom Thomson. Unfortunately, that one got a little dinged in the moving, but it will be repaired.

1800

Here's the thing: The Group of Seven have influenced so many people. My sister Missy is an artist. She's a great artist. So when debating this bill came up, I meant to call her last night, and I only was able to text her this afternoon. But I want to read you some of the comments that she's made, because I think they're important: "As a side note, Mom met A.Y. Jackson at the Bank of Montreal"—Missy's got a great memory—"on Sparks Street when we were little babies. They had a conversation.

"Another time, dad picked up A.Y. Jackson at the train station—it could have been the airport—and they had a conversation too, which is pretty spectacular, that they met both of them and they had both of their paintings—copies, prints—in their home.

"Mom and dad took us to the national gallery from a very young age, and number one stop would be the paintings of the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson.

"We had two large framed prints in our house, and they were the standard of what beautiful art was.

"And a friendly story: We met A.Y. Jackson twice, first in the bank, and then picking up dad at the train station, and we still have a little printed note from A.Y. Jackson to dad thanking him for picking him up.

"We spent a lot of time in the Gattineau Park up at Chelsea, and the next place was by the covered bridge—can't think of the name—and at this time, we would go for Chelsea buns and see the ice break up and pick pussy willows, and mom and dad were very big on getting their kids into the great outdoors and nature, so those paintings made perfect sense to us.

"Take what you want away. Make it shorter. Personally, for me, I would say those paintings were the number one influence to me of what art and painting was all about. And have fun."

That's why this private member's bill is important: It's important to recognize the role of the Group of Seven in not just promoting art but promoting Canada, Ontario, the scenes, inspiring people not just to become artists but to get outside and enjoy the beautiful, wonderful province that we live in.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: It's truly an honour and a privilege to speak to this bill. The story of the Group of Seven is the story of Ontario.

A couple of years ago my wife and I decided to embark on a road trip along Lake Superior, and at the top of—I'll call it a hill; I'd like to think it's a mountain, but it isn't that tall. There's a shelter, and it has a monument and a display dedicated to the Group of Seven and the types of landscapes that they described in the province.

I think the work of the Group of Seven truly shows the world what Ontario's natural beauty is all about, and it doesn't matter where in the province of Ontario. There are images of Algonquin park. There are images of Killarney park. There's the northeast that's represented. There's Manitoulin Island and Algoma.

But with all of it being considered, what do we want to achieve in Ontario? We want to achieve a place where people feel at home, a place that we're proud of, and this is something that the Group of Seven delivered in spades. They identified countless images that reflect the best of Ontario, the best of our natural beauty and truly showing that we are on par with any landscape worldwide.

Any time that I'm in an art gallery, I will seek out the Group of Seven paintings. They are so in demand. Unfortunately, some of them have disappeared over the years. I'm aware that in Sudbury in 1974, some of their paintings that were held at the school were unfortunately stolen because of the significance of those paintings and what the Group of Seven means to us.

I would say, Madam Speaker, that Lake Superior truly is the path of the Group of Seven. You could consider that whole run from Sault Ste. Marie westerly to Thunder Bay as being a Group of Seven highway. You will stop at immeasurable places that demonstrate the iconic images that represent Ontario. One that's not on that route but is certainly immortalized is in Killbear Provincial Park: the leaning tree, which has become, effectively, that park's brand. If you go there today, you'll see that we're trying to do our best to keep it from toppling. It is there nonetheless, still going strong—and I'd like to say thriving, but it's being supported because of its importance to our collective history in the province of Ontario.

When someone from across the world thinks of Ontario and what it all means, they will be forever thinking of the images described by the Group of Seven that tell our story. They don't necessarily tell the story of our people; those images can be left to others. But what the images do tell is exactly why we call Ontario home. This is a beautiful province. This is a beautiful place. It is, in some ways, a bit difficult to access sometimes. I'm lucky that down in my constituency, I can leave Ontario, go through I-75 north to Sault Ste. Marie and get there in less time than you would have to here from Queen's Park. But nonetheless, I'm blessed to live where I live because I have access to the gateway to the north and the gateway to the Group of Seven.

One thing I will also add is the Group of Seven also represents in some ways, through their associate, which was Tom Thomson, the great, great Ontario pastime of paddling your canoe. There are so many images that become undiscovered treasures when you hit the water and you go into the interior and you are on the lookout for one of those iconic images that the Group of Seven was able to capture. There's nothing better than going on that treasure hunt and finding this is what inspired these painters who just wanted to show off the best. And these places were not always easy to access, so it shows the commitment to the art that they would go for days into the interior of some of these places, some of which weren't even protected as natural environment parks back when they undertook the paintings. Yet, they felt the value was there, they took the time, they brought all their supplies in and they worked.

With that, I will cease now. Thank you so much for much for allowing me to speak to the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's a pleasure to rise tonight in support of this bill, Bill 158, to name the seventh day of the seventh month Group of Seven Day. This is a group that defined our art, defined our nation at a time when we were a young nation. They really have been iconic, and the pictures and the artists that have been named so far speak to that.

But I'd like to speak to my personal connection, and that of Simcoe–Grey, with the Group of Seven. Tom Thomson is from Owen Sound and is buried in Meaford, and he has had a profound effect on my area, Georgian Bay, with the incredible Cambrian shield of Georgian Bay, the relentless west wind and the tenacious pine trees that were the inspiration for the West Wind.

The Group of Seven used the Jackman family cottage. Hal Jackman was our 25th Lieutenant Governor. They used his cottage and, in appreciation, they painted a mural there. About 20 years ago, there was an undertaking to have that mural moved down. The original is now in the McMichael gallery, and the Jackman family can enjoy a reproduction. So there's a very strong connection there to the Georgian Bay area and the shores of Georgian Bay, and my neighbours Greg and Helen—their son Geoff wrote a book called Tom Thomson's Last Bonfire, in which he recounts the finding of Tom Thomson's body in Canoe Lake and how his friends, two trappers and other friends from the area, kept vigil over his body for 24 hours until it was picked up by the authorities. It's a wonderful read, and I would recommend it to everybody: Tom Thomson's Last Bonfire.

1810

Tom grew up in Grey county and is buried there now. Lawren Harris also had a very profound effect in my riding. Frederick Banting was a painting compatriot of the Group of Seven, and he worked with Lawren Harris—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. The member now has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Brian Riddell: I would like to thank Andrew Dowie, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, for your insightful contributions to today's debate. I would like to also thank the Honourable Minister Todd McCarthy, the member for Durham and the original sponsor of this bill, for honouring the Group of Seven, and I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Brian Saunderson, MPP for Simcoe–Grey.

To me, the Group of Seven—and having a background in art and being able to express it is a very difficult thing, and I really would consider the Group of Seven being able to go out into the wilderness, capture those visions and be able to express it—it's an expression of Ontario and Canada.

But I would also like to state that Indigenous art, from the member's discussions from across the way, is also very important, but what really describes Canada is the Group of Seven, and there's nothing else like that.

Emily Carr University in Vancouver: I visited it. They have Indigenous art. I'm a collector of Indigenous art myself, and I admire it. All art forms are important, but when I think of Canadiana and I talk to people from around the world, they recognize the Group of Seven.

I thank all speakers for today and for your consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Riddell has moved second reading of Bill 158, An Act to proclaim Group of Seven Day. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Pursuant to standing order 100, the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Do you wish to refer it to committee?

Mr. Brian Riddell: I would like to refer this to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to heritage, infrastructure and cultural policy? Agreed? Agreed. The bill is now referred to heritage, infrastructure and cultural policy.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, we now have a late show.

Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Orléans has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Attorney General. The member has up to five minutes to debate the

matter. The minister or the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Madam Speaker, one of the basic tenets of western democracy is of course the independence of the courts. Unlike our American neighbours, we don't appoint judges based on their political affiliations or a stringent set of litmus tests—ideologically based litmus tests. But here in Ontario, the Premier and the Attorney General want to change that. They have repeatedly said over and over again that they do have litmus tests, that they want judges who are like-minded. But we don't know, and they haven't really expressed, what like-minded means.

Now, Madam Speaker, we know, since this government has been elected that judges are being interviewed by the Attorney General behind closed doors without the benefit of transparency and public scrutiny. So what do like-minded judges look like? Do they look the other way as the Premier and his political cronies face investigation by the authorities? I think it's a question the residents of Ontario would like answered. We don't know because all this is happening behind closed doors.

So what exactly are we talking about? The Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee was established to develop and recommend comprehensive, sound and useful criteria for the selection of appointments to the judiciary, ensuring that the best candidates are considered; and, second, to interview applicants selected by it or referred to it by the Attorney General and then to make recommendations. Effectively, this committee reviews and vets potential judges here in Ontario.

Now, what has the Premier done? The Premier has appointed unqualified political insiders with no legal background to this committee. And he's admitted that they've been appointed to ensure that his litmus test is met. So we have partisan political insiders, both former senior officials in the Premier's office, sitting on the committee that will review, vet and recommend new judges to this government. Moreover, the individual they've appointed to be the chairperson for this committee is a registered, paid gun lobbyist for Colt. Colt is, of course, one of the largest manufacturers of guns in the world. They produce a wide variety of guns, including automatic handguns and larger weapons like the AR-15 assault rifle, the weapon of choice for mass shootings.

The Premier says he wants judges who will be tougher during bail hearings. On this we can agree. This is why I worked with members of the committee last year on bail reform. But other than this statement, Madam Speaker, we have no idea what the Premier's litmus tests are.

Here in Ontario, police reported 4,791 violent gun crimes in 2022. That's 1,000 more than the previous year. Homicides by gun crime are at an all-time high. That means there is a violent gun crime in Ontario occurring every two hours. It's apparent to me—and it should be apparent to the government—that there are quite enough guns on our streets already.

Ontario doesn't need a politicized justice system. It needs police forces that are properly resourced. Police

need the policies and technology to do their job and help keep us safe. Politicizing the judicial system with friends and political insiders won't help the police do their job. It's a dangerous precedent, one that takes us away from the tradition of judicial independence and brings us closer and closer to the politicized system that is used and abused south of the border.

Instead of giving police forces in Ontario the resources they need, the Premier has appointed unqualified, biased insiders, notably his former deputy chief of staff, to lead the panel that makes judicial recommendations to be "like-minded." But as I mentioned, this like-minded individual is a gun lobbyist. Is he going to be like-minded to his old boss who wants to be tough on crime? Or is he going to be like-minded with his new bosses who are some of the biggest gun runners in the world?

I think it's reasonable to ask how we can expect these judges to be tough on gun crime when the person recommending them for the job and the person who leads the vetting for the job is also a person who helps the world's biggest gunmakers sell more guns. This is a clear conflict, Madam Speaker. Where do this person's loyalties lie? Where does his like-mindedness lie? There is a good reason that we don't allow tobacco lobbyists to run Smoke-Free Ontario, and there should be a very good reason we don't let gun lobbyists recommend judges in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Simcoe–Grey, the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: On this side of the House, our loyalties lie to the residents of Ontario. In April 2021, as part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, amendments were made to the Courts of Justice Act that changed the process for appointing three lawyer members to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee, or the JAAC.

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Previously, the Law Society of Ontario, the Ontario Bar Association, and the Federation of Ontario Law Associations each appointed their own representatives to the committee. With the amendments, the law society, the Ontario Bar Association and the federation of law associations are still involved in the process of appointing candidates. The amendments allow the Attorney General to appoint three lawyer members from lists of recommended candidates provided by each of the organizations. This change aligns and ensures consistency with the approach for law society members of the Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee—that would be the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee.

The appointees that the member opposite is mentioning are two out of a total of 12 active members, and they were both chosen due to their extensive public policy experience and volunteer activities. As well, neither had any interaction with MAG in terms of lobbying.

A total of four members have to agree on a possible applicant before they can be sent on to the Attorney General. This means that the committee, not the individual members, recommends candidates to the Attorney General, following an in-depth application process, including

interviews and multiple reference checks. This is an in-depth and properly conducted process that finds some of the brightest legal minds here in this province.

Vacancy on the bench are advertised on the Ontario Courts website as the need arises, and that request is made by the chief justice of the Ontario Court of Justice. The candidates must submit a prescribed application form. These applications are reviewed by the committee, and a short list is prepared and submitted by the committee to the Attorney General. One of the changes we have made is that the committee must put forward six applicants as opposed to two, and that that rolling list is carried forward. So if more judicial appointments are required within the 12-month period, the names on that list are revisited first before we go back for more. This ensures a fast and efficient appointment system.

After reference checks, confidential inquiries and interviews, the committee then sends the ranked list of its recommendations to the Attorney General who then must make the appointment from that list. The Attorney General can only recommend the appointment of candidates who have been recommended by the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee for the vacancy. The Attorney General does not receive the names or identifying information of candidates who have not been recommended. By filling judicial vacancies more quickly, Ontarians will benefit from a justice system that responds to the needs of people navigating the legal process.

We are focusing on appointing judges to ensure that communities are safe and criminals are put in jail. Since 2019, the Ministry of the Attorney General has appointed 89 judges in Ontario. These judges were appointed based on their merit, based on their ability, based on their record and based more importantly on the recommendations of the judicial advisory committee.

I had the great privilege of meeting today with the members of the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association. We had a great discussion about a number of issues, and one of the issues they addressed is trying to limit the use of jury trials because of the time and delay it takes, and restrict those to only certain types of civil claims. This is what they had to say, and this is what they said in their submissions to us: “Judges are trained to be fair, unbiased and ethical in their decision-making.” That is a stalwart of this process of our judiciary and of their role in the democratic process. This is an essential part: We will continue to ensure our judges come trained and prepared with experience.

On the issue of bail, as the members opposite knows, as a member of the justice policy standing committee, the recommendations on bail reform have focused on trying to keep 3% of chronic repeat offenders who have been committing violent offences using firearms in the past—to ensure that they’re not getting bail. We heard cases of these individuals being released on bail not once, not twice, but three times, and continuing to commit offences while they’re out on bail. The terrible death of Constable Pierzchala was committed by a man who was out on bail. At the time, he had cut his bracelet—electronic tracing bracelet—and had been on the lam for three months. That is what we’re trying to prevent, and that is why this government is making significant investments to plug in those holes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the members. There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1825.

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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
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Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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Vacant	Milton	