



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 150 • NUMBER 181

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**THE LATE WILLIAM WITHROW, C.M., O.ONT.**

Statement by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Wednesday, February 14, 2018

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### THE LATE WILLIAM WITHROW, C.M., O.ONT.

**Hon. Patricia Bovey:** Honourable senators, it is with real sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to a giant of Canada's cultural and visual arts community, William Withrow, C.M., O. Ont, C.D., F.C.M.A., F.O.C.A. who passed away at age 91 on January 7, 2018.

Director of the Art Gallery of Ontario from 1961 until his retirement in 1991, his accomplishments were many — his legacy positively affecting audiences, artists and galleries across Canada and abroad. He had a keen eye, an incisive and artistic mind, good business sense, fundraising and diplomatic skills, and was a wise and generous mentor to many. I knew him for decades, having worked at the AGO as a student and with him again later as a colleague in the Canadian Art Museum Directors Organization.

A stickler for museological ethics, he was a leader in raising Canada's museological standards, approaching every issue with dedication and questioning, never drawing conclusions until he had assessed every angle from multiple perspectives. Bill's advice was sought by all governments on myriad issues, from exhibition fees to copyright, insurance for international exhibitions to tax provisions for donors. His voice was integral in establishing Canada's Cultural Property Export and Import Act, the Canada Travelling Exhibitions Indemnification Program, the 1998 Copyright Act and more.

Bill was co-chair with Clément Richard of the 1986 Withrow Richard National Museums Task Force, commissioned by the Mulroney government and spearheaded by Minister Marcel Masse. I was a member. Through our intense hearings across the country, we addressed the structure of Canada's national museums and funding of regional museums and galleries. Bill ensured our reach included the full range of Canada's collecting galleries and museums.

Our key recommendation was to dismantle the National Museums of Canada Corporation and create the Museums Act, establishing Canada's national museums as Crown corporations, each with its own board of trustees. Accepting this recommendation, the government passed the Museums Act in 1990. Bill was thrilled.

Bill's keen sense of humour was evident to us all. We went as the Canadian Art Museum Directors Organization to Alert Bay's U'Mista Cultural Centre to see the repatriated coppers. It was memorable. It was pouring. We were all drenched. I at least had a West Coast raincoat, pants and jacket on, but my photo shows Bill and his wife, June, soaked in their raincoats, huddled under their umbrella inside the local laundromat, laughing, with water pouring down both inside and out.

Colleagues, this giant will be missed. On behalf of us all, I extend condolences to his wife. Their seventieth wedding anniversary would have been two weeks after his passing. Thank you, Bill, for your can-do, empowering attitude, your wit, wisdom, perseverance and genuine bonhomie.