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Senate moves four bills to royal assent

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The Senate on Thursday pushed four bills toward royal assent, including legislation permitting Canada to introduce safeguards to curb surges of cheap steel imports and another affirming the jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples for child and family services in their communities.

Earlier this afternoon, senators adopted at third reading Bill C-101, which would temporarily amend the Customs Tariff and the Canadian International Trade Tribunal Act to lift the two-year moratorium on the imposition of safeguard measures on imports previously subject to safeguards actions.

The legislative change will allow Ottawa to implement safeguard measures in quicker fashion if needed that could limit a flood of cheaper steel imports, an issue the United States and Canada agreed to address after section 232 tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum were lifted by the Trump administration last month.

Conservative senators, despite supporting the bill, voiced concerns about quickly C-101 was pushed through both chambers. Finance Minister Bill Morneau introduced the bill on June 6, giving it two-to-three weeks to pass through the House and Senate, with both chambers rising for the summer break by the end of June.

Sen. Nicole Eaton noted that C-101 was only subjected to one pre-study meeting by the Senate finance committee as it worked its way through the upper chamber.

READ MORE: [Liberals to table bill providing more power to prevent flood of cheap steel imports](#)

After dealing with the steel bill, senators turned their attention to legislation aimed at protecting threatened Indigenous languages in Canada.

After a brief debate, senators voted to not insist on amendments they made that were rejected by the Liberals to Bill C-91, which the Liberals say will bring more substantial support from Ottawa to help threatened Indigenous languages, including establishing a new Indigenous languages commissioner.

The vote means the bill now only needs royal assent to become law.

Introduced by Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez in February, Bill C-91 promises to support and promote the use of Indigenous languages in Canada, establish measures to ensure long-term funding and reflect the objectives of the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), as well as the aforementioned commissioner's office.

At the bill's introductory event at the National Arts Centre, Rodriguez was joined by Assembly of First Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde and M tis Nation Minister of Heritage and Culture Clara Morin Dal Col, though the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), which represents Inuit peoples, was conspicuously absent from the proceedings.

The group accused the bill of failing to protect the right to speak their own language or including measures "necessary to support its revitalization, maintenance, and promotion."

READ MORE: [Liberals to use closure on national security, steel imports bills](#)

The Senate next voted to not insist on changes to the Liberal government's Indigenous child welfare bill, despite concerns from some Manitoba senators that the terms of the legislation would override a deal reached between Ottawa and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) in 2017 via a memorandum of understanding.

The AMC then developed a draft bill based on the agreement, dubbed the "Bringing our Children Home Act," which the group describes as a "Manitoba-specific" legislation on children and families.

Bill C-92 would cede authority for Indigenous child welfare services from other levels of governments to the Indigenous communities themselves. Critics have long assailed that provincial government programs aren't properly equipped to handle the unique needs of Indigenous children.

Independent Manitoba senators Mary Jane McCallum and Marilou McPhedran wrote a letter last week to Indigenous Services Minister Seamus O'Regan asking for greater clarity on how the bill will "enable First Nations communities in Manitoba to exercise jurisdiction and control of child welfare systems for First Nations' children."

The letter came as the AMC renewed its call for a Manitoba exemption to the law to ensure the 2017 agreement would not be impacted.

Independent Sen. Murray Sinclair said [during third reading debate last week](#) that a clause in the bill ensures current agreements are not affected by C-92.

"In my view, the memorandum of understanding that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs is afraid is going to be negatively affected by this legislation will not, in fact, be negatively affected to a certain extent," he said.

Finally, senators voted to not insist on amendments made to the Liberal government's criminal justice legislation that were not accepted by the House, paving the way for Bill C-75 to become law.

In a message sent to the Senate, the Liberals said they are not accepting a Senate amendment that would allow non-lawyer agents to represent defendants standing trial for summary convictions if authorized by the province where the proceeding is taking place. However, the government backed upper chamber amendments on collecting DNA samples and fingerprints.

BACKGROUND: [Liberal government rejects Senate agent amendment to criminal justice bill](#)

Bill C-75 represents the Liberal government's efforts to ease the country's problematic court delays. In a bid to ease the backlog of cases delaying court trials, the bill would make 118 currently straight indictable offences - that come with maximum penalties of two, five and 10 years in prison - into hybrid ones. The Liberals are also proposing in the bill to increase the maximum penalties for summary convictions to just under two years.

Summary offences are less serious as the maximum penalty is currently six months in prison and/or a \$5,000 fine. Indictment offences capture far more serious conduct like murder and aggravated assault.

For hybrid offences, the Crown can choose whether to proceed by indictment or summary conviction.

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