



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## **ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE**

ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY

Statement by:  
The Honourable Bev Busson

Thursday, May 27, 2021

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### ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY

**Hon. Bev Busson:** Honourable senators, I rise today to mark the one hundred and forty-eighth anniversary of the creation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, an organization that I am proud to have been a part of for 33 years. The story of the RCMP is a microcosm of Canada and was born of the most basic of Canadian preoccupations — our neighbours to the south.

The Americans had shown themselves to be forcefully expansionist, marking their occupation of the West by deadly confrontations with Indigenous people through their aggressive government policies. The Canadian government sought a different model. Sir John A. Macdonald considered a police presence in the territory for about eight years before acting. Finally, the House of Commons provided him with the authority to create a police force on May 23, 1873, with hardly a debate and with a unanimous vote.

At this time, the Northwest Territory from Fort Garry in Manitoba to the colony of British Columbia was without a government presence and at the risk of being overrun by invaders from the south. The most infamous of these incursions was the Cypress Hills Massacre, when at least 20 Assiniboine men, women and children were murdered by whisky traders from Fort Benton in Montana. The threat of American annexation of large parts of the Northwest Territory, as had been done in California and Texas, also hung heavily on the minds of the government.

While plans for a railway would soon fill the West with migrants, Ottawa worked to avoid the lawless “wild west” culture and the worst excesses of the American experience.

Into this crisis, Macdonald sent 150 officers and recruits of the newly formed North-West Mounted Police. They were dressed in the red tunic of the British Army to differentiate them from the blue of the U.S. Army. One cannot deny the tragedy of this clash of European and Indigenous cultures, but in 1873, expansion was inevitable. The first members of the North-West Mounted Police built relationships with Indigenous leaders and also offered sanctuary to Sitting Bull when he and his warriors fled over the border into Canada. The force subsequently refused entry to the pursuing 7th Cavalry.

Almost a century and a half later, it is possible that, if the RCMP had not been created, large swaths of Western Canada could now be part of the United States.

Today, the RCMP has approximately 30,000 employees, representative of almost every culture in this diverse nation. They operate in every province and territory in Canada performing duties from school liaison to anti-terrorism, and also conduct UN peacekeeping functions around the world, most recently in April, sending a contingent to help guard civilians against sexual- and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Since its creation, approximately 245 RCMP officers have died in the line of duty, and we thank them for their service and their sacrifice. Thank you, *meegwetch*

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