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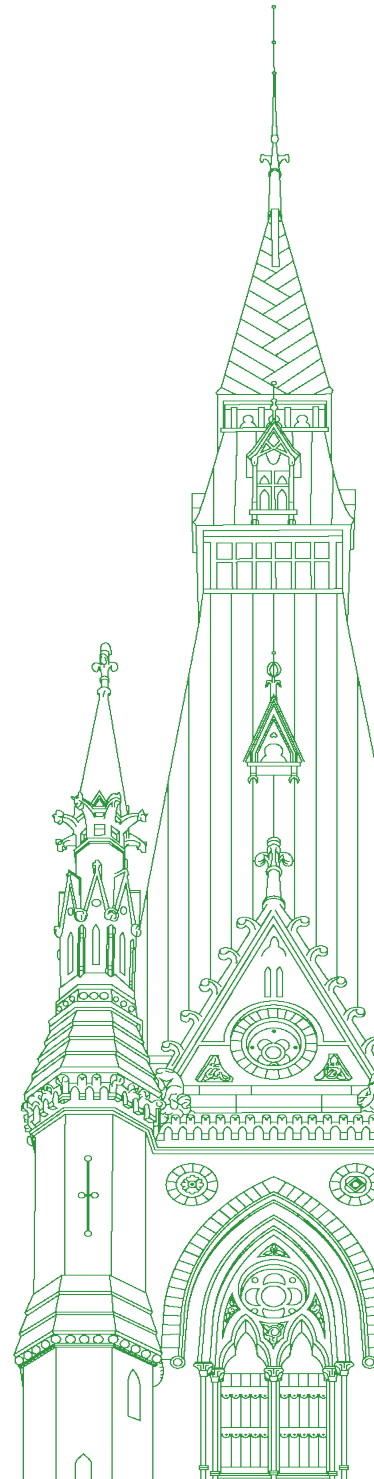
Standing Committee on Finance

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 087

Tuesday, May 2, 2023

Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca



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• (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 87 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, April 20, 2023, the committee is meeting to discuss the subject matter of Bill C-47, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 28, 2023, as well as divisions 10 to 31, 35, 36, 38 and 39.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute it when you are not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, there is a choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses. With us today, we have 14 departments and 48 officials. Due to the limited time, I won't be recognizing all of you by name, but on behalf of the committee and in advance of the many questions you will be answering as best you can, we want to thank you. Thank you for your work on the budget. Thank you for being before us for this committee meeting and for this study.

When answering questions, please commence with your name, department and title.

I understand that Mr. Graeme Hamilton will be making some quick opening remarks, and then we will commence with a round of questions from the members.

Members, please note that some of the witnesses are in the adjacent room with a simultaneous audio and video feed. Please be mindful when posing your questions to give them a chance to arrive in our room. The clerk and I will take the time to do that into consideration when calculating your allotted time for asking questions.

We will also leave a seat open—I believe it's number 22—here at our table for anybody entering the room or coming from the back and joining us at the table to answer questions.

Mr. Hamilton is going to make his opening remarks.

I see a hand up. Go ahead MP Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning.

I have a quick point of order. A few weeks ago, the Department of Finance officials pledged to provide the committee with a detailed list of planned expenditures for the \$80 billion in green economy and transition funding. I'd like to follow up with the department on that. The clerk also followed up.

The information is especially important since Bill C-47 introduces mechanisms that put the money beyond Parliament's control. That's why we need the information before we vote on Bill C-47.

Mr. Chair, I'd also like to know whether we have a date scheduled for the Minister of Finance's appearance on Bill C-47.

[*English*]

The Chair: I believe we have PS Beech.

Do you want to speak to the minister's appearance?

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): Yes. I'll speak to both.

It would certainly be helpful to try to get any information that Gabriel needs.

With regard to the ministerial appearance, we haven't selected a specific day, but the minister has committed to appearing prior to the 18th. We're just trying to get a finalized time.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, PS Beech.

Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

I have looked to the clerk. We have made the request, and we will ensure that the request is followed up on.

Now we're going to Mr. Hamilton for some opening remarks, please.

Mr. Graeme Hamilton (Director General, Traveller, Commercial and Trade Policy, Canada Border Services Agency): First off, I'd like to say good morning to the members of this committee and to my colleagues from across the Government of Canada.

I am Graeme Hamilton, director general of traveller, commercial and trade policy at the Canada Border Services Agency.

I'd like to thank all of you for inviting this diverse group of people to come and answer your questions. We're here to answer to the best of our ability any questions you may have on our particular measures contained within the BIA, which is in front of you.

With that, I'll turn it over to you for any questions you may have.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much for those opening remarks, Mr. Hamilton.

We have many officials here with us. I know members will have many questions.

We're going right into the question rounds.

In the first round, each party will have up to six minutes to ask questions, pausing of course if there is any transition time with the witnesses.

We are starting with the Conservatives. I have MP Chambers up for six minutes, please.

• (1110)

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, everyone.

I have questions for Mrs. Thomas. If she's not at the table, I'll give some time for her to come in.

Thank you for all of your hard work on the budget. It takes a lot of effort to do that.

This is my first opportunity to mark the passing of Gordon Lightfoot, who was a resident.... He was born and raised in Orillia, Ontario. He was a Canadian music legend. He is to Canadian music what the Group of Seven is to art. I'm sure we'll do tributes to him in the House later today.

Thank you, Mrs. Thomas, for being here. I have some questions about operating costs and people.

I'm curious how many individuals will be hired as a result of the measures in the first budget bill.

Mrs. Nicole Thomas (Executive Director, Costing, Charging and Transfer Payments, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you for the question.

I'm Nicole Thomas, executive director in the financial management sector at Treasury Board Secretariat.

There is no new funding being requested to implement this measure. As it relates largely to streamlining processes and introducing flexibilities, implementation of the amendments is not expected to require any additional FTEs.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Sorry, is that for all the measures in the budget bill?

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: That's with respect to division 12 in the Service Fees Act.

Mr. Adam Chambers: What about all of the measures in the budget bill?

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: It's not within my area of responsibility. I don't have those details.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Okay. Is that information that somebody from Treasury Board would be able to provide?

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: I can certainly take it back to my colleagues.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you.

Last year when we asked the question, they said it was a Treasury Board question. We didn't have anyone from Treasury Board at our hearings last year.

We care about this because, one, we're in a very tight labour market, and two, we've seen significant growth in the public service. Both the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General have expressed concerns about the lack of a fulsome human resource management people plan across departments.

I think every project or new fund that gets created has some kind of operating cost. If you would take some of these questions back, it would be very helpful for us as we deliberate.

Thank you for your time.

I'll move to those here who know a bit about the dental care plan. I have a couple of questions.

Thank you very much. Please introduce yourself.

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg (Director General, Policy and Programs, Dental Care Task Force, Department of Health): Good morning. I'm Lindy VanAmburg. I'm the director general responsible for policy and program design around the dental care commitments the government has made at Health Canada.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you.

We see a \$13-billion cost over five years. I think that's projected for the plan. I'm curious, and I think some of my colleagues are. Does that number include an assumption made for the uploading of individuals who are currently covered today but who may not be covered in the future?

I'll explain, just so we're clear. We are already seeing private sector employers carving out individuals who could be covered by the federal plan but who are already covered by the private plan.

I'm curious about whether you're making an assumption that individuals will have their plans uploaded to the federal government, whether it be from the provincial government or from the private sector.

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg: The estimate included in the budget measures—the \$13 billion over five years—is based on our current best estimates of Canadians who are within the income threshold, which is a family income below \$90,000 a year, and who are currently uninsured.

The estimate is for what we would call “displacement”, which is additional money that would come to the government if somebody didn't maintain their current plan. However, I would say the measure included here that would compel employers to report whether they offer coverage or not is in part intended to make sure that we can track who currently has insurance and who doesn't.

Mr. Adam Chambers: If someone has coverage today and their employer carves them out the following year, will they not be covered by the federal plan?

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg: If they are not insured, they would be eligible. If they are insured, they would not be eligible.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you.

The \$13 billion is just a number that represents those who are currently uninsured.

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg: Yes. It is our current best estimate.

Mr. Adam Chambers: It's possible that this number could actually increase substantially as private sector individuals and provinces.... In fact, I've seen a couple of instances where provinces are no longer covering certain individuals who fall in the eligibility category.

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg: We've only been able to estimate based on who we know now is eligible. It's something we'll watch carefully as things change over time, if they do.

• (1115)

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you.

Do you have an estimate on annual operating costs for the measure?

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg: No, I don't have it with me. There are certain measures within that amount that would be costed out for Health Canada's component of it. There will be others. You will see, in this part of the bill that relates to employer reporting, that Service Canada will be helping us with enrolment and eligibility. We'll be relying on data from the Canada Revenue Agency, so we would expect there to be some cost there. In addition, we will be relying on the assistance of the third party benefits administrator, and there will be operating costs there.

Some of those elements are still being worked through to understand exactly what the cost will be. We don't have a firm estimate at this time. There are broad estimates included in the amount that was provided.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Would you mind sharing the broad estimates with the committee in writing following the meeting?

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg: Yes. I don't have that with me, but we're happy to come back.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: MP Chambers, you still have an extra minute. You're good? Thank you.

We're going to the Liberals and MP MacDonald for six minutes, please.

Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses who are here today.

I want to talk a bit about division 13, which amends the Canada pension plan to allow the Minister of National Revenue to make available information to the Minister of Employment and Social Development.

What types of information is the Minister of National Revenue currently sharing with the Minister of Employment and Social Development?

Hon. Neil Leblanc (Director, Canada Pension Plan Policy and Legislation, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): This is Neal Leblanc. I'm the director of CPP policy and legislation at Employment and Social Development Canada.

At the moment, the information being collected by the Minister of National Revenue and shared for the purposes of the Canada pension plan is only the data necessary to calculate benefits. It's effectively information related specifically to pensionable earnings to CPP and contributions, in addition to some very basic demographic information.

The goal of this is to put us back where we had been in the past when we had access to data that allowed us to see a more fulsome picture of Canadians to get an idea, for instance, of how much the Canada pension plan represents of that person's total income in retirement.

It would put us in the same position that the old age security pension program and employment insurance employment program are in, in terms of being able to use other data collected by CRA in order to do program evaluation and policy work.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Mr. Leblanc, you said that basically this was done previously but now you want to go back to it. Are there new types of information?

Hon. Neil Leblanc: No. Specifically what's happened here is that this is a clarification to the legislation that we were asked to make by the Canada Revenue Agency.

We used to have access to this data. They had since determined that the wording in the legislation could be interpreted that we did not. The intent of this is to make it explicit that we do have access to this data for these specific purposes.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: I'm just curious. The CPP—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: My apologies for interrupting, Mr. MacDonald.

I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Ste-Marie, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: The audio quality isn't good enough for the interpreters to interpret.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Leblanc, we're having some difficulty with your sound for the interpreters. I think it's pretty clear, but maybe you could speak more slowly. That may help.

For all the witnesses and members, at the last meeting we had at this committee, we were having trouble with feedback that was coming back between the earpiece and the mikes, so just keep any devices you may have with you away from each other and away from the mikes.

Maybe we can try Mr. Leblanc just to see if speaking slowly works.

Go ahead.

Hon. Neil Leblanc: My apologies. I will endeavour to speak somewhat more slowly.

As I said, the reason for this legislative change is essentially to clarify the legislation and to restore us to a point where we had been in the past. It was requested by the Canada Revenue Agency, because they had determined that the current wording did not allow access to this data we had been using—I'll say as recently as 10 years ago—for these purposes. It was a matter of wanting to make explicit that this data could be used in this way, as is the case for both employment insurance and the old age security program.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Mr. Leblanc, do we have any forecasts for what effects this might have on the CPP?

Hon. Neil Leblanc: Having more data will allow us to ensure that the program is more responsive to the needs of Canadians. At the same time, the legislation and amendment formulas for the CPP make it very challenging to change. We need the formal approval of seven provinces to make any changes to benefits in addition to an act of Parliament.

Based on that, this is purely a matter of being better informed and having that extra information to provide better advice to ministers who will be making potential decisions about ways to adapt the program.

• (1120)

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

The Chair: You have three minutes, MP MacDonald.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: That's perfect. I'm going to change course a bit.

The BIA strengthens our air passenger protections regime to make the process more efficient and to ensure passengers receive compensation from airlines.

Can someone describe the ways these changes will disincentivize airlines from pursuing cases at the CTA instead of settling with passengers?

Mr. Colin Stacey (Director General, Air Policy, Department of Transport): Good morning. My name is Colin Stacey. I'm the director general of air policy at Transport Canada. I'm very pleased to answer that question.

The changes in Bill C-47 will have a significant impact on how the air passenger protection regulations are administered, in a couple of ways.

To begin with, they are changing the onus: placing more onus on the air carriers themselves. The way they're doing this is... Currently in the regulations, there are different categories. There are three categories of incident, two of which allow the air carriers to not provide compensation in instances where there are significant delays or cancellations. Those would be where the carrier interprets that an incident is not within its control or where the carrier interprets that an incident is due to safety.

Those categories will disappear, and instead there will be more onus on the carriers themselves to provide compensation in all incidents, except for those incidents that are deemed to be exceptional. A specific list will be articulated in the regulations themselves. As a result of that, to begin with, there will be fewer complaints.

In addition, the legislation will require that the air carriers cover the costs of complaints that go forward, and that are within scope to go forward, to the Canadian Transportation Agency. Once again, that will provide an additional incentive for the carriers to address complaints directly with passengers before they get passed over to the Canadian Transportation Agency. On top of that, I note there will be a specific timeline required for the air carriers to address those complaints with passengers.

Those are various ways in which we would expect there to be fewer complaints. Beyond that, I note there will also be an improvement in the process so that those complaints will be addressed more quickly.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Now we will move to the Bloc and MP Ste-Marie for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to all the senior officials joining us in person and remotely. We really appreciate the work you do.

My first questions are for the Privy Council officials in relation to division 31 of Bill C-47.

Basically, division 31—

[English]

The Chair: Just a second, please, MP Ste-Marie. We're going to pause. We can't hear you very well.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Are you saying my audio quality is poor, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: It's a volume issue, MP Ste-Marie. Can you speak a little more?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Yes, I will keep talking while you do the checks.

Is that better?

[English]

The Chair: Okay. We're good. The members are good.

MP Ste-Marie, you're coming through clearly. Thank you.

You can start now. We did pause your time. Go ahead.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you. That's very generous.

My question is for the Privy Council officials. Division 31 pertains to the Royal Style and Titles Act. Frankly, I was very surprised to come across the following in section 2 of the proposed act, at clause 510 of the bill, near the end of a hundred-plus-page document:

Charles the Third, by the Grace of God King of Canada and His other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth.

It's the royal proclamation under the Great Seal.

What is that doing hidden at the end of a budget implementation bill? Is it a way to conceal a huge change in the system?

I've often asked my fellow committee members whether this was hidden at the end of a budget implementation bill last time.

Mr. Joël Girouard (Senior Privy Council Officer, Machinery of Government, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Joël Girouard, and I am a senior Privy Council officer.

I'm not sure how it was laid out in the 1953 bill, but this is an administrative provision. Ideally, it would be passed close to the date of the King's coronation, May 6. That's partially why the choice was made. It was the right time to introduce the legislation, and this is an administrative measure, in our view.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you for your answer.

In our two previous meetings, I asked senior finance officials to provide a written response to this next question, and I'm going to ask you the same one. The last time, was this part of a budget implementation bill or another bill?

I can't see why it's not part of another bill, so it can be voted on separately, if not for political reasons. Do you have any other information you can share with us about that?

Mr. Joël Girouard: As you know, the department doesn't bring forward bills. That said, we felt it was acceptable to include this measure in the budget implementation bill because it was administrative.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: As I see it, this is much more than an administrative measure because it makes Charles III the King of Canada.

Obviously, then, I look forward to your written response as to how this was done the last time.

My next questions are about employment insurance, or EI, so they're for the senior officials from the Department of Employment and Social Development.

[English]

The Chair: MP Ste-Marie, we have paused the time again as the witnesses come to the table.

Mr. Leblanc, who was with us virtually, will no longer be able to participate due to the quality of the sound and the effect on the interpreters.

You may commence.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Bloc Québécois has been asking the government to absorb the EI account deficit accumulated during the pandemic, as it did for all the sectors of the economy. The government doesn't seem to be doing that, however.

The bill doesn't include any changes to bring balance to the EI account, despite the rule that the account be balanced over seven years. That means workers' and employers' premiums will have to cover the \$17-billion deficit. Do I have that right?

Mr. Benoit Cadieux (Director, Policy Analysis and Initiatives, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Yes, you are correct.

Crediting the EI operating account to absorb the pandemic-related expenditures would require legislation.

I also want to mention that the premium rate is \$1.63. The EI chief actuary's latest forecast puts the seven-year break-even rate at \$1.73. That forecast will be repeated this summer, and a new report will be released in September. That will give us a better estimate of the premium rate for 2024 and the rate required to balance the operating account.

• (1130)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That's very clear.

I want to stay on the topic of EI, but I'm not sure whether my next question is directly tied to the changes proposed in Bill C-47.

Last Wednesday, the spokesperson for the Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses met with senior Service Canada officials, including senior assistant deputy minister Tammy Bélanger. The department confirmed that, for privacy reasons, it would no longer provide information on the files of claimants represented by organizations assisting unemployed workers. That is an assault on the primary mission groups like these have taken on, which is to support and represent workers. What's more, it severely limits people's access to justice.

Does Bill C-47 change things? The Privacy Act is not new legislation, so what is the reason behind the decision? On top of it, these claimants duly sign a form appointing their representative. Do you no longer recognize those consent forms? How do you explain the change?

[English]

The Chair: We're well over time, but perhaps you could give us a very short answer, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: I think we'll have to take note of your question and get back to you with an answer, because that doesn't fall under our purview.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Yes, you can get back to the committee with a written answer. We would appreciate that. Thank you.

Thank you again.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

Now we're going to the NDP and MP Blaikie for six minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm curious with respect to division 22(d), which has to do with rail interswitching. Why is the government considering a pilot for interswitching at this time to increase the interswitching distance?

Ms. Tamara Rudge (Director General, Surface Transportation Policy, Department of Transport): I'm Tamara Rudge. I'm the director general for surface transportation policy at Transport Canada.

Currently, regulated interswitching is at 30 kilometres. That provides shippers with a radius from the interchange point with guaranteed access to another carrier at a rate regulated by the Canadian Transportation Agency without an application. This means it's easy to use and they have cost certainty. Also, shippers indicate that it provides meaningful leverage when they're negotiating contracts with the railways.

We have another piece called long-haul interswitching. That was introduced in 2018 as a competitive option for shippers outside of that 30 kilometres. This measure hasn't been used. There have been concerns from shippers about the measure, because you have to apply to the agency, so you have uncertainty as you apply and they will determine the cost. Then you have to take that once you've ap-

plied. It doesn't give them the same type of leverage as the normal interswitching does.

During the work of the supply chain task force, they put forward a recommendation on interswitching to extend the distance. Therefore, in the budget implementation act we are mimicking an approach that was taken from 2014 to 2017 to increase the limit to 160 kilometres for a pilot of 18 months to gather more data.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: When that longer interswitching distance was in place, as you said, for about three years, from 2014 to 2017, there was another task force, under David Emerson, that looked at that and recommended that the practice be terminated. What has changed between 2017 and now such that the government, which was prepared to and did in fact put an end to that practice, thinks it would be advisable to do the same thing again? What results do you think you'll get that you didn't get between 2014 and 2017?

Ms. Tamara Rudge: The Emerson report was completed at the end of 2015. The previous measure had not been in place that long, so when the Emerson task force made their recommendations, they didn't have the full information. In fact, for that previous measure, there was an uptake over the three years of those using the extended interswitching measure. This time—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If I could just intervene, my understanding is that uptake largely meant a lot more freight was being moved by the BNSF in the United States along the southern edge of the Canada-U.S. border, and it resulted in a loss of work for folks at railways like CN and CP. Has the department conducted any kind of analysis in terms of what they think the employment impact will be for Canadian rail workers?

• (1135)

Ms. Tamara Rudge: From 2014 to 2017, less than 1% of traffic in the Prairies actually used extended interswitching. At the time—and we're going to collect more data under this pilot—I don't think we had evidence of that. This time we will be getting information from the railways and from shippers during the pilot so the government can do a full assessment of the impacts, such as whether there is an impact on employment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: You should be aware that I've heard from railways and I've heard from railway unions. Their impression is that it did cause a loss of work for folks who worked at Canada's major railways and that the organization that benefited most was an American railway. You can take that as feedback into the department, and I would encourage the department to ask those questions and to get that information during the course of this pilot.

Ms. Tamara Rudge: Absolutely. I think we will also be looking at the impacts on employment of the shippers and whether they were able to ship more of what forestry or agriculture was able to grow.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Do you think through legislation we can cause farmers to grow more grain?

Ms. Tamara Rudge: Well, maybe they will get better contracts so that grain can be shipped differently, or better access, which helps.

This is a measure that shippers say is very important for their businesses to grow. It's not limited to just grain. It is all commodities. Last time, there were different industries that used it, such as chemicals. We know that forest products have been interested in this also.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Could you provide the committee with a list of industry associations or companies that, in the course of the consultation that went into preparing this measure, have asked for the increased interswitching distance?

Ms. Tamara Rudge: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I'm doing a time check. How am I doing?

The Chair: You have about one minute, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

For the officials from ESDC, I wanted to confirm the sections of the act that pertain to the employment insurance board of appeal.

We have a bill currently before Parliament that institutes changes to that appeal mechanism. Are these provisions identical to the separate bill that's currently before the House?

Mr. Steven Coté (Executive Director, Employment Insurance, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Mr. Chair, there's another person coming in the room to speak to those measures.

The Chair: We can pause the time to allow for that official to make his or her way into the room.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Lalonde (Director, Individual Payments and On-Demand Services, Benefits and Integrated Services Branch, Service Canada, Department of Employment and Social Development): Good morning and thank you. I am Robert Lalonde from Service Canada.

[English]

Effectively, the legislation in Bill C-47 is exactly identical to Bill C-37, which was tabled in December.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie. That's the time.

Witnesses and members, we are moving into our second round of questions. The timing is a little different in this round.

We'll be starting with the Conservatives, and that's for five minutes.

I have MP Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I was hoping to talk to the Privy Council. If Mr. Girouard could join us, that would be terrific.

Thank you very much, sir.

I have some questions with respect to our great public officials, and I do mean great.

I thank you all for being here. I know you work very hard.

If you don't have the answers right now, that's fine. You can provide them in writing.

For transparency, what is the total cost per civil servant right now? That means their salary, equipment and computer. What is the cost per civil servant?

Mr. Joël Girouard: Is there perhaps an official that the question could be better directed to? I'm here on behalf of the Privy Council Office for the Royal Style and Titles Act.

• (1140)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have “machinery of government” as your title here.

Could someone from the Treasury Board...?

Mr. Joël Girouard: Perhaps that would be the best choice, yes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: No worries.

As I said, I don't need the answer today. If we could get it in writing, that would be great.

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: Good morning. Thank you for the question.

This is Nicole Thomas, executive director within the financial management sector at Treasury Board Secretariat.

That question is outside of the area of my responsibility, but I'd be happy to take it to officials.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's perfect.

Could we also get what the cost was in 2008?

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: Yes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have another question for you. This might be outside of your scope, but I would appreciate if you could take it back and provide an answer in writing.

What's the impact of the recent settlement with respect to PSAC on the debt, the deficit and government spending?

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: Again, I don't have an answer for you today, but I can take that back.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's great. Thank you very much for that.

I'm going to give the rest of my time to Marty.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start more with a comment about this particular budget. Part 4 in particular has 39 divisions. Each division in and of itself could be an independent piece of legislation.

Going through this is really overwhelming. For example, the part about division 24—the Customs Act and Quarantine Act—just in the Q and A is 21 pages long.

I'm not sure I'm really clear on how we as a finance committee can give proper scrutiny to something like this. I'm not the only one who feels this way when it comes to this sort of omnibus legislation. For example, in 2013, the current Prime Minister said that he was upset with the prior government doing this exact sort of thing. He said, "omnibus bills...prevent Parliament from properly reviewing and debating his proposals. We will...bring an end to this undemocratic practice."

On omnibus bills, he went on to say, "I wouldn't use them." This is in 2013. "There will always be big bills, but they need to be thematically and substantively linked in all their different pieces so that they form a piece of legislation. The kitchen-sink approach here is a real worry to me."

I'm wondering how this happens. The Government of Canada's website defines what a budget is: "The Budget is a blueprint for how the Government wants to set the annual economic agenda for Canada." However, in division 4 there are provisions on refugees. I'm sure a lot of these are laudable goals. I'm not criticizing the legislation itself, but we see the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Yukon Act, the Marine Liability Act, the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act, passenger air rights, the National Research Council Act, the Patent Act, and cosmetic testing on animals, which I'm sure is a very laudable goal. I'm not sure what it's doing, though, in a budget implementation bill.

Do you see my problem?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I think the questions the honourable member has are very important. I think it is very important for us to be responding to why we're putting certain elements into a bill. I think all the questions being asked are super important.

I do not believe, though, that they are questions for our civil servants, who are here to answer technical questions on each of the items. I think they should be reserved for our minister when she comes.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

MP Morantz, that did exhaust the time.

• (1145)

Mr. Marty Morantz: Can you—

The Chair: We are moving now to MP Chatel for five minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Morantz, on a point of order.

Mr. Marty Morantz: My time should not be docked for—

The Chair: We didn't. You reached the five minutes. That was the time.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I was done? Great. I will pick this up in my next round.

The Chair: Okay, MP Morantz.

We'll go over to MP Chatel for five minutes, please.

I do pause the time, members, when there is a transition with witnesses. Also, I'm going to ask witnesses to make sure that your voices are heard through the mikes and to make sure the mikes are well positioned so members can hear you.

Go ahead, MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Brimmell, I have questions about division 11 of the bill.

As we speak, my community and many others in Quebec are experiencing the effects of the climate crisis yet again. Many areas have been flooded. Unfortunately, two firefighters are even missing in Charlesvoix. The climate crisis is having tremendous repercussions, and we are feeling them more and more.

I'm glad to see the government has addressed the crisis in the budget, even proposing to make Montreal the host city to the new NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence. When we were hit by floods in 2017 and 2019, the armed forces had to be deployed to the Outaouais. The armed forces and NATO are paying more and more attention to climate change security. With this NATO centre being set up in Montreal, how will Canada benefit?

Ms. Blair Brimmell (Head of Section, Climate and Security, Security and Defence Relations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you. I am Blair Brimmell, head of the climate and security policy section at Global Affairs Canada. I am also the acting director for this new NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence.

Canada will benefit from this new centre of excellence in many ways. The centre will help Canada, its allies and international partners better understand all the ways that climate change will impact our security interests.

The centre's work is meant to help Canada and its allies come up with policies and measures so that armed forces can better adapt to a security environment affected by climate change. The centre will also be a way for Canada to identify best practices and share information with international partners.

Lastly, the centre of excellence will help Canada and its allies find ways that armed and security forces can reduce their climate impact and greenhouse gas emissions. This will address the global necessity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I am very glad that Montreal will be the host city for this important NATO centre. May our leadership of this very important mission Canada has taken on meet with every success. Great work.

Now, I'm going to turn to you, Mr. Turcot, to discuss division 25 of the bill. Much has been said about Canada lagging behind when it comes to business productivity and innovation. The budget contains additional funding for the National Research Council of Canada. Can you give us concrete examples of how this funding will stimulate business innovation and productivity, especially among small and medium-sized businesses? How will the research council be able to help them?

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair: It's a great question, but we're almost at the end of the time, so maybe give one example really quickly, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Turcot (Director General, Policy, Strategy and Performance, National Research Council of Canada): Thank you very much. My name is Marcel Turcot, and I am the director general of policy at the National Research Council of Canada, or NRC.

The NRC provides small and medium-sized businesses with access to centres, plants and other infrastructure. These are facilities they could not build themselves. The NRC provides businesses with expertise they wouldn't otherwise have. They're able to test out new products and grow their research and development knowledge to improve goods and services processes for Canada.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chatel.

Now we'll go to the Bloc for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is about division 36 of the bill, so it's for the environment officials. Are they already with us?

[English]

The Chair: They are making their way to the table right now. We will pause the time for that transition.

The floor is yours. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Currently, the carbon tax that big polluters pay is used to fund green projects in the province where it was collected. If the oil companies don't have any green projects, they lose the money at the end of the year. It's a bit like the infrastructure money for municipalities: if the work isn't carried out by the end of the year, they lose the money.

If Bill C-47 is passed, division 36 will make it possible to put the money aside for future use. That could incentivize oil companies to take their time, so they would be in no rush. Do I understand the division correctly?

[English]

Ms. Paola Mellow (Executive Director, Low Carbon Fuels Division, Department of the Environment): Thank you.

My name is Paola Mellow. I'm the executive director of the low-carbon fuels division at Environment and Climate Change Canada.

If I understood your question correctly, it was with respect to carbon pricing.

What we are talking about here today is an amendment to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Carbon pricing is not associated with that act. We are speaking about the clean fuel regulations. These regulations impose a life-cycle carbon intensity reduction requirement on fossil fuel producers and importers in Canada, like, for example, refineries.

Basically this change enables a compliance fund mechanism. What that means is that regulated parties—for example, refineries—will be required to come into compliance with their obligations every year. If they choose to come into compliance with 10% of their annual obligation through contributions to the fund, they will need to do that in their compliance year. The fund will then have five years to deliver real short-term reductions with those funds.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I'm going to stay on the same topic. If division 36 of Bill C-47 is not passed, what will happen to those refineries and oil companies?

[English]

Ms. Paola Mellow: There is a suite of compliance options underneath this regulation. As I stated, the option to comply through investment into the compliance fund mechanism is only 10% at most in a year. The regulation itself is based on a credit market. Regulated parties, such as refineries, need to retire credits equal to their debits at the end of every compliance year. Those credits can be created in a suite of ways.

There are generally three credit creation categories we talk about. The first one is GHG reduction projects along the life cycle of fossil fuels, like, for example, carbon capture and storage at a refinery. We also talk about a second credit creation category, which is low-carbon-intensity fuels, such as blending gasoline with ethanol. A third credit creation category is advanced vehicle technologies, such as EV fleets.

A regulated party needs to retire credits equal to their obligation each year. They can generate credits by taking actions in the three compliance categories I discussed. They can also purchase credits from other credit creators—that could be regulated parties or voluntary parties—or they could make use of compliance flexibility, such as, for example, this compliance fund.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mellow.

Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we will go to MP Blaikie, please, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

My question is in respect of division 16 in part 4. It would amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act “to provide that a claim for refugee protection made by a person inside Canada must be made in person and, with regard to a claim made by the person other than at a port of entry, that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration may specify the documents and information to be provided and the form and manner in which they are to be provided.”

I know that recently the government adopted the Conservative position on the safe third country agreement and that the implementation of that agreement will change substantially as a result. I'm curious to know whether these changes are tied to that in any way. How will the interaction between what's being proposed here and the safe third country agreement happen?

The Chair: We're just in the middle of a transition here. I believe Mr. Chan is here to answer your question.

Perhaps you can introduce yourself and the department, and answer the member's question.

Mr. David Chan (Acting Director, Asylum Policy, Performance and Governance Division, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good afternoon. I'm David Chan, acting director of asylum policy at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

What these amendments bring is not really related to the safe third country agreement. The amendments we're putting forward are in relation to the practice of online claims that were introduced during the pandemic. We weren't able to do these processes in person, so we allowed claimants to file their claims online.

With the pandemic behind us, we're looking to formalize this arrangement because it has provided enormous benefits to case processing for claimants to be able to access their claims online, and for a more seamless data transfer among departments that are involved in claim processing.

That's really the main focus of the amendments under division 16.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: When this amendment says that folks will have to apply in person, that's in addition to applying online. The

idea is that they will do an online application, but they won't count as having applied until they appear in person. It's more like an in-person component. It's not like the entire application is done in person. Am I understanding that properly?

Mr. David Chan: You're correct that the amendments will more formally introduce an in-person requirement. As you can imagine, prior to the pandemic the process by which a claimant would make a claim was always done in person. It was never necessary to put that in law.

Now that we're embracing the online mechanism, we need to be more clear in law to say that a claim is not considered made from the perspective of the law until the claimant meets with an officer to verify some of the integrity requirements from the IRCC's perspective. It's just for collecting their documents. It's just for verification that they're in fact in Canada, because that's a fundamental principle of why we provide protection to claimants.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie and Mr. Chan.

Now we're going to the Conservatives and back to MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just picking up where I left off, there are a few other legislative initiatives within part 4, like attempts to solve issues with Canada Post parcels being stolen—and I'm not sure what that has to do with a budget—and establishing the employment insurance appeal board.

I guess my point is that a few years ago I thought there was a lesson learned. A few years ago, in the budget implementation bill, there was a section that amended the Criminal Code to allow for deferred prosecution agreements. That initiative led to a major scandal that resulted in the dismissal of the first indigenous attorney general in the history of Canada.

When I see these kinds of bills, I worry, because there's just so much in them. I know the government wants to get their bill passed, and there's pressure to get it done.

I'm wondering if anyone can answer this question. Are there any changes in Bill C-47 that would benefit any one particular company? Can anyone here answer that? You don't know. There might be. There's a lot of silence around the table.

Okay, I'll go on to something else, but I think that non-response speaks volumes.

I want to ask a question about SEMA and the Magnitsky act. Is there someone here who can take that up?

Specifically, my question has to do with the prior changes. The briefing notes say:

In response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine...Canada implemented legislative changes to both SEMA and JVCFOA to authorize the Minister of Foreign Affairs to seek forfeiture of seized assets. The forfeited funds can be used in support of reconstruction of a foreign State, to restore international peace and security, and/or as compensation to victims.

I'm just wondering what action has happened under that section since it was implemented. What's the value of assets seized to date? Have any of these monies been allocated to reconstruction or as compensation to victims?

● (1200)

Ms. Marie-Josée Langlois (Director General, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): My name is Marie-Josée Langlois. I'm the director general for the strategic policy branch at Global Affairs Canada.

Thank you for your question on the sanctions and the seizure and forfeiture clauses that were passed last summer.

As you know, those clauses were passed last summer. In December, the government announced a first seizure of \$26 million, which is believed to be related to Roman Abramovich.

The departments are working together on gathering information and following due process. The clauses bring into place a multistep process. Once seizures are done of assets related to listed persons, we work together to develop the evidentiary package and find the information to support an application. The second step is an application to the superior court of the province in which the assets are found. From there, depending on the decision of the court, the disposal of the proceeds will follow the act.

In terms of the first assets, we're still working on those steps.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Is \$26 million the total amount that's been seized?

Ms. Marie-Josée Langlois: The RCMP lists the amounts that were frozen, because as soon as sanctions come into force, amounts are frozen. Canadians can no longer deal with listed people. The RCMP has a website that provides the amounts that were frozen, which is updated regularly.

The first seizure was of \$26 million in funds.

Mr. Marty Morantz: When I was on the foreign affairs committee, we spent a lot of time talking about the sanctions, of course, especially once the invasion took place.

Do you think the particular legislative changes outlined in division 10 should be studied at the foreign affairs committee, as opposed to the finance committee?

Ms. Marie-Josée Langlois: I know the foreign affairs committee talks about sanctions quite a bit, as you've noted. There's been a decision by them recently saying that they would like to look at sanctions issues.

The Senate committee is also looking at the sanctions legislation, with a report that will soon be forthcoming.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

Now we're off to the Liberals and MP Baker, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much, Chair.

I'd like to start by thanking everybody for being here.

Usually, I like to ask questions of every witness on the panel. You'll forgive me if I don't do that today, but I want to sincerely thank you for all your work in preparing the BIA and for your work on behalf of Canadians every day. Thank you for being with us here today to share your knowledge.

What I want to do is come back to Ms. Langlois, if I could, on the topic that was being discussed previously on the seizure of assets.

Could you speak briefly to what the desired impact is of the measure whereby the Canadian government can not only sanction and freeze those assets, but actually seize them and use them for the reconstruction of Ukraine? What's the intended impact?

● (1205)

Ms. Marie-Josée Langlois: At the heart of the sanctions application, including the seizure and forfeiture parts of it, is an intention to change behaviour, to hold people to account in terms of respecting international norms and rules, and to advocate for key issues for Canada. An example is the protection of human rights and addressing significant corruption.

Mr. Yvan Baker: In the context of Russia's genocidal war on Ukraine, what are some of the desired changes in behaviour that we are hoping to see as a result of the measures you've just spoken about?

Ms. Marie-Josée Langlois: In terms of the sanctions that have been imposed to date in the context of Russia, as you can see, a number of measures have been imposed. There are dealings bans on Canadians. There are also services measures and measures related to goods.

Basically, we want to send the signal that the situation is not acceptable, and that those who try to benefit from or support that situation cannot use the Canadian financial system and cannot use Canadians to enrich themselves or support or contribute to what's going on right now.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I represent a community called Etobicoke Centre, which is a suburban community that borders Pearson airport in Toronto. It brings joy to me every time I drive up Highway 427, which is adjacent to Pearson airport, because I see a big cargo plane with a big Russian flag parked there. I don't know if it was strategically planned that way, but I really appreciate that they parked the plane in such a way that it has maximum visibility. My understanding is that it's been parked there since late February of last year, shortly after Russia's further invasion of Ukraine.

My understanding is that it is subject to sanctions. In other words, it cannot be moved. I believe that was initially because of transport regulations.

Are you able to speak to that particular plane and what the Government of Canada's intent is with regard to that plane?

Ms. Marie-Josée Langlois: Last year, in February, as you noted, the Department of Transport had a no-fly measure for planes of Russian origin. That's why the plane is at Pearson airport. On April 11, the government announced sanctions on the Volga-Dnepr Group, which is believed to be the owner of that aircraft. That aircraft is now frozen, as are the assets of anyone who is on the list of sanctioned individuals and persons.

In terms of future plans, I cannot address that.

Mr. Yvan Baker: My hope is we freeze, seize and sell as many of the assets as possible of those linked in any way with supporting Russia's war in Ukraine. I think it would have the impact of getting the behaviour we need to see, as you suggested earlier, by imposing costs on the Russian state, on Vladimir Putin and on his regime. I think the more costs are imposed, the more likely it is that Russia will eventually have to withdraw from Ukraine and stop perpetrating the human rights abuses it perpetrates every day against the Ukrainian people.

Not only that, but it's really important that we.... I believe we should impose the harshest sanctions possible. These measures are part of that.

I thank you for the work you've done thus far. I encourage you and your colleagues to do as much as you possibly can as quickly as you possibly can. It's not just because lives are at stake in Ukraine or Ukrainian sovereignty is at stake. I think Ukraine winning this war is in Canada's interests, for our security and the quality of life we enjoy here in Canada. I think we need to do everything we can so Ukraine wins. When Ukraine wins, we will all win.

I thank you for that work and I encourage you to keep moving forward.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Baker and Ms. Langlois.

I border MP Baker's riding and drive up Highway 427, and I have to say that it does give me a great deal of glee to look at that plane parked there and to know that sanctions have stopped it from moving. Hopefully it can be sold to help with Ukraine.

We're on to round three of questions.

I have MP Chambers for five minutes for the Conservatives, please.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to talk about the EI changes, specifically for workers in the 13 regions where we're planning to extend EI by an additional five weeks.

My understanding is that the five-week extension is a temporary measure.

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: That's correct. The measure is being extended by one year, up to October 28, 2024.

Mr. Adam Chambers: What's the average unemployment in the 13 regions above the national average? Does that makes sense?

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: When the 13 regions were initially chosen back in 2017, they were chosen in part because there were higher than average unemployment rates in each of those regions. I don't have the most recent numbers with me. However, as you know, the unemployment rate has decreased significantly across Canada, including in those regions.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Could you provide the committee with information on the 13 regions, like where they are and their unemployment versus the national average? Is that reasonable information?

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: Yes, that is information we can provide.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you.

I read that—maybe there was a pilot—10% of applicants at the end of an EI period did not have a job prospect, and that's one of the reasons we are extending it by five weeks. Is that correct?

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: That's correct. The pilot that was done from 2018 to 2021 found that in the reference period, which is 2013, 10% of seasonal claimants did have a gap between the end of their EI benefits and the start of their subsequent season.

Mr. Adam Chambers: The reference year was 2013.

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: That's correct.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I'm trying to understand why we would—

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: The reason is that this was a year in which there were no additional supports provided to seasonal claimants.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I guess I'm trying to understand, though, why we would give 100% of the people in a region an additional benefit that might only help 10%.

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: Not all seasonal claimants need the extra weeks. A lot of them return to work before they even need additional weeks.

Among those who do need them, they took on average 3.9 additional weeks of benefits, and based on the pilot, we know that approximately 42% of eligible claimants did access at least one additional week of benefits.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Is there a study or something that you're referencing? Is that something you could provide to the committee, if it's publicly available? The link is fine.

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: There is an evaluation. It is publicly available. It is on the web.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you.

Ten per cent, though, is maybe close to what the unemployment rate is in these regions anyway, and we're also in a period of time.... I know we're looking at the 2013 period, but every region in the country is at a historical low for unemployment. Regardless of where they are versus the national average, historically we're at a very low unemployment rate with a very tight labour market.

Can you understand why some people might ask why we're extending unemployment benefits while there's not quite a million but almost a million vacant jobs in the country?

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: The other reason we're targeting claimants in those regions in particular is that they have a higher than average percentage of seasonal workers compared to other regions across the country. That, combined with the higher unemployment rates on average, means that it's more difficult for these workers to find work during the off-season. That's why we're targeting those regions and those workers in particular.

● (1215)

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you. I'll look forward to some of the follow-up information.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chambers.

Now we'll go to MP Dzerowicz for five minutes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I too want to thank everyone for being here today. Thanks for your hard work.

I'm going to start off with a couple of comments, because there have been some very thoughtful questions from some of my colleagues on the opposite side, and I'd like to address them.

My colleague Mr. Chambers talked about how many new FTEs there are in this budget, and there's a lot of concern around that. It's an important concern and is something we always have to be thinking about. For those who might be watching from home, it's important to know that we are an activist government. We have been one since we were first elected.

We've put in place major unbelievable programs, like national child care. We're putting in national dental care. The reconciliation that we're doing is historic. We're taking aggressive climate action and promoting gender equity and innovative economic measures around innovation and immigration. There are lots of reasons there has been a big increase in FTE counts.

I would say, though, that it's very important for every government to always ask, as we're introducing new programs, what tightening we need to do. It is important to note that in this year's budget, we have \$15.4 billion over five years for a reduction plan. We should always be looking at where we should be reducing as we're looking to adjust programs. Those are absolutely important questions, but I think it's important to put that on the record.

My colleague Mr. Morantz mentioned that a number of different elements are included as part of budget 2023 and asked what the correlation is. I want to say that budgets by various governments have included a number of different elements. Our government is very careful to ensure that all of the measures included are either mentioned in some budgets, whether it's budget 2023 or budget 2022.... The former Conservative government, when they were in power, did not do that and often included elements that had no reference to any other budget. I just wanted to point that out in terms of the difference.

With that, I have about 45,000 questions and only two and a half minutes to ask them.

I'm going to start off with some immigration measures.

If I go to part 4, division 16, part 4, division 17 and part 4, division 19, we have a number of changes or amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act: capping the number of sponsorship applications, establishing a clear framework for asylum claims and providing electronic means to administer and enforce the Citizenship Act modernization program.

My key question is for whoever might be here to respond. I forget. Was it Mr. Pink who responded before? I want to see how this will improve processing times, if Mr. Pink happens to be here.

I don't see him here, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'll pause the time. Is there an official to answer any of those questions?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: If not, then I will just ask the officials to please respond in writing to that. I would be grateful, just because I think it is important to have these measures. It is important for us to be dealing with processing times.

The Chair: Just wait.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Oh, they're in the other room. Thank you.

The Chair: We have about a minute and a half left.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Yes, but please don't take all that time. I have 44 more questions.

Mr. Chan is who I was thinking of.

The Chair: Have you captured the question? Yes. Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Nicole Girard (Director General, Citizenship Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will start.

The measures with regard to the Citizenship Act are intended to address some legislative gaps. Unlike the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the immigration program, the Citizenship Act and citizenship program have very limited authorities for electronic administration and efficiencies, which are essential for us to continue to improve the modernization of the program under way and to vastly improve client service.

In addition, the citizenship program is the only remaining program in the government that subjects applications for citizenship to a name-based, date-of-birth-based criminality check via the RCMP. Through the budget, amendments are being sought to move to a biometric process, which will be more efficient and will secure and enable more rapid checks.

Those measures together, once the legislation passes and can be implemented, are aimed at catching up to the authorities that exist in the immigration act and will also continue our efforts to vastly improve the service that citizenship applicants expect.

I'll just pass it to my colleague with regard to the other part of your question.

Sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Nicole Girard, the director general responsible for citizenship policy.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Be very short, please.

Ms. Michelle Mascoll (Director General, Resettlement Policy Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'm Michelle Mascoll, director general of resettlement policy.

Really quickly, for division 17, the objective is to manage application intake to bring the number of applications we receive more in line with the targets set out in our immigration levels plan so that we'll be able to manage our processing times and backlogs better.

The Chair: Thank you to all of you.

Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

Now we'll go to MP Ste-Marie for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are about division 23 of the bill, so it's for the transport officials. Could they please come to the table?

While we're waiting, I'd like to thank Mr. Beech. We just got the answers to the questions we had asked. The information isn't broken down by province and doesn't provide much detail per sector, but we really appreciate the response that was provided.

I'd also like to take this opportunity, Mr. Chair, to reiterate something. If I understood Ms. Dzerowicz correctly, she has numerous questions, so it's very important for everyone on the committee to get the answers to all of their questions before voting on Bill C-47. I think we'll need at least a hundred or so more committee hours to get through the honourable member's list of questions.

I will now ask the transport officials my questions on division 23 of the bill.

Which exceptions is the Canadian Transportation Agency expected to define in the regulations regarding the minimum compensation air carriers are required to provide to passengers for disruptions caused by a flight delay or cancellation, or by being denied boarding? What will happen to a complaint if the dispute resolution officer doesn't make a decision within the prescribed time frame?

Thank you.

Mr. Colin Stacey: Thank you.

I'll start with the first question.

[English]

The Chair: Could you please introduce yourself?

[Translation]

Mr. Colin Stacey: My apologies. My name is Colin Stacey, and I am the director general of air policy at Transport Canada.

In response to your first question, Mr. Ste-Marie, I can say that the Canadian Transportation Agency will be responsible for defining the exceptions in the regulations, so we don't know now what those exceptions will be.

If I understand your second question correctly, you would like to know what consequences air carriers will face when they do not comply with the 30-day deadline after receiving a complaint. Is that correct?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Yes, that's correct.

What happens if the dispute resolution officer doesn't make a decision within the prescribed time frame?

Mr. Vincent Millette (Director, National Air Services Policy, Department of Transport): Good afternoon. I am Vincent Millette, director of national air services policy.

If the dispute resolution officer doesn't issue a decision within the prescribed time frame, they would not be complying with the legislative framework, but presumably, they would be allowed to complete their review of the complaint.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[English]

Now it's over to MP Blaikie for two and a half minutes.

• (1225)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

In respect of the Royal Style and Titles Act, I'm curious as to what the practical consequences would be if Parliament weren't to approve these changes. I understand, whether folks like it or not, that Canada is a constitutional monarchy. We have a new monarch, and presumably they have some say in how they're titled.

I'm curious to know what would happen if Parliament didn't institute a new title for the new monarch.

Mr. Joël Girouard: Thank you. It's Joël Girouard again, from the Privy Council Office.

The royal style and titles are used in formal documents and a variety of situations like that. As I mentioned earlier, we consider it an administrative measure. There's no real consequence if it is not adopted.

The King became the King of Canada last September, and that does not change. The Royal Style and Titles Act simply allows us to formally give him a title. This new version modernizes the title to better reflect Canada's current reality, but there's no practical consequence if it's not adopted.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Okay, so this title is already in use and this is just a housekeeping measure. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Joël Girouard: The title has not been used to this point. The Queen's old title has been used out of respect for allowing Parliament to express its will. It does not have a practical effect if it is not adopted.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Okay. Thank you very much.

I was hoping that somebody from the Privy Council Office might be able to speak to the final division in the bill, which has to do with the application of privacy principles to federal political parties. I understand that this is a response to a court decision from the province of British Columbia.

I wonder if an official could provide a little more context for the committee.

The Chair: Ms. Pereira, could you introduce yourself?

Mrs. Rachel Pereira (Director, Democratic Institutions, Privy Council Office): Yes. I'm Rachel Pereira, director of democratic institutions at the Privy Council Office.

Thank you for the question.

If I understood it, the intent of this measure is to establish a single, uniform national privacy policy for federal political parties under the Canada Elections Act. If there are other pieces of legislation, this would deem the federal regime the regime that federal political parties would need to abide by.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Is this coming up in response to any particular court decision or other deliberations about privacy principles, privacy legislation and federal political parties?

Mrs. Rachel Pereira: I can't speak to other pieces of provincial legislation, nor litigation that's in play. I can speak to the intent of the legislation, which is to establish a single national regime for federal political parties. That's to mitigate the potential for a patchwork of different rules and regulations that federal political parties would need to consider depending on potentially which province they're in. It would be a federal regime for all federal political parties.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: You're not in a position to advise the committee whether this—

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie. We've gone well over time.

Now we're going to the Conservatives and MP Lawrence, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, thank you to all of you for being here today.

In the budget, it was announced that there would be a 3% cut to departments, pretty much across the board, starting in 2024. I assume that you've probably already started planning towards 2024, or you will soon.

I'll start with you, Mr. Hamilton.

Have you started planning for 2024, and do you believe that it will be easy to remove 3% from your budget?

Mr. Graeme Hamilton: Thank you very much for the question.

Unfortunately, my area of expertise is outside of the budget planning cycle. I'm not in a position to respond to that question.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Is there any official who has started the planning process on reducing their budget by 3%? In six or seven months, you're going to be reducing your budget by 3%. Has anyone started that planning process?

You can take the microphone. If you're in the other room, you can run in here right now and tell me that you've started the process of cutting 3%.

• (1230)

Ms. Lindy VanAmburg: This is Lindy VanAmburg from Health Canada. I think in most of our departments or agencies, that would be a question for our chief financial officers. I don't imagine they've been invited here today.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Let's invite them, then, Mr. Chair. I have some skepticism, and I think maybe that was validated by the response there.

Next I would like to talk about the clean fuel regulations. If anyone is able to comment on the clean fuel regulations, I'd very much like to hear from them.

Again, thank you to all the officials for being here in the crowded room. I very much appreciate you being here, especially in the room.

As I said, you may not know these numbers off the top of your head, so an answer in writing will be more than fine. What will be the total cost to the economy of implementing the clean fuel regulations?

Ms. Paola Mellow: Thank you for that question. My name is Paolo Mellow. I'm executive director of the low-carbon fuels division at Environment and Climate Change Canada.

I have not come prepared to speak to the costs. However, an economic assessment accompanied the final regulations. That is public. It does detail the economic framework that was used to assess the regulations. It has costs, it has benefits and it has greenhouse gas reductions. That information is publicly available.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you. I appreciate that. If you could send the link to the committee, that would be terrific.

Would you happen to know from that report, or even within a reasonable margin of error, what the cost per litre of gasoline, diesel or home heating fuel would be?

Ms. Paola Mellow: I would prefer to follow up in writing, because there is a suite of economic assumptions made around the analysis. I would not want to misrepresent any of the costs without having that framework.

We absolutely can respond in writing.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's fine. That's great.

What would be the cost to the government of enforcing the clean fuel regulations?

Ms. Paola Mellow: Again, that economic analysis will include cost estimates to government for administering the regulations.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Perfect. You're now excused, as it were. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

Next I want to talk to someone with respect to the National Research Council.

That's you, Mr. Turcot. Thank you very much.

It's my understanding that you are asking to have your own separate procurement process. I'm curious to know why.

Mr. Marcel Turcot: Thank you for the question. I'm director general of policy at the National Research Council.

What we are intending to do with this measure is speed up the operations of the NRC so we can better work with our Canadian business partners and academic innovators. At the NRC, we often have to procure pieces of scientific equipment in order to perform our research services and technical services with our collaborators and clients. We perform R and D services for those clients. The purpose of the measure is to speed up that process so that we're not having our clients wait six months to a year for us to process the paperwork through the normal cycle.

What we would like to do is have an increased speed of operations so that we have a more rapid response and more effective partnerships with our clients, overseen by a procurement oversight board that will ensure that we have all the appropriate mechanisms in place.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

I understand the necessity for procurement. I completely understand and respect that need. However, you're saying that through the normal Public Works process, you'd have to wait six months to a year to get what you need.

Mr. Marcel Turcot: It depends on what you're procuring. It depends on the financial limits, the types of contracts and the specifics that you want to put into the contracts. For example, if you have to go through Public Works and then get Treasury Board approval, that process can take six months to a year. That's what I was referring to in my response.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Lawrence.

Now we'll go to MP MacDonald for five minutes.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question will be on EI.

The Chair: We'll just wait for the transition.

• (1235)

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Mr. Chair, I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Beech today.

Mr. Cadieux, sticking to the Gordon Lightfoot tribute, Mr. Chambers asked some of the questions that I was going to ask. If you could read my mind, Mr. Chambers.... I think you did.

What criteria is utilized to determine which economic regions are eligible for the extension, compared to those that are not?

Mr. Benoit Cadieux: As I mentioned in the previous round of questions, the regions were determined in 2017 for the 2018 to 2021 pilot. There were two conditions they had to meet. They had to have an unemployment rate higher than the national average, which at the time was 6.3%. Those regions also had to have a higher than average percentage of seasonal workers. At the time, about 4% of the workforce had to be seasonal workers. Those were the two criteria used for why those 13 regions were chosen.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

I'm from Prince Edward Island, by the way, which is a very seasonal province in Canada. We have two EI zones, which is unfortunate. We have families on one side of the road who require so many hours. Possibly a family member lives across the road and requires fewer than those hours. That was an initiative of the former Conservative government. It is extremely unfair in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you for the answer.

I'll now turn my time over to Mr. Beech.

The Chair: We'll move on to PS Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague for generously sharing his time.

Colleagues, there have been significant discussions about the motion that I tabled yesterday. My apologies to the 48 officials who are currently here. Hopefully we'll get back to you very quickly.

Given that it's the topic we're currently studying, I would like to take this opportunity to move this motion. I apologize in advance for the length. It is a necessity to make sure that we meet the needs and desires of all the conversations we had. Members will find that it is in a form similar to last year's to make sure that we get a minimum of 20 hours of witness study.

The other aspect speaks to something that Mr. Morantz was referring to earlier in this meeting, which is dividing up the bill and a timeline for that, and sending some of these sections to committee. If other committees would like to comment on or study them, they'll have the opportunity to do so.

The one thing I'll note is you'll find that everybody's opinions on how it should be divided were included here. There were a couple of minor conflicts. Luckily we were able to work with critics and resolve those conflicts around which criteria or which content should go to which individual committee. This reflects the consensus of all committee members.

I hope we can pass it rather quickly.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech.

I did see some hands go up. It's MP Chambers and then MP Lawrence. Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Is it the ruling of the chair that the motion is valid, given it has not seen the proper notice period?

The Chair: It is procedural. It is allowed.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I think we should allow our witnesses to go home. This is going to take some time.

Don't worry. You won't offend us. You can probably feel free to go.

The Chair: Let's see, MP Chambers. We'll let the witnesses stay and we'll see how this goes.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Well, I think we should buckle up, because this motion is missing a few things. It's a good thing, I guess, that we have virtual Parliament now, because we usually have some time limits. If this was the old days, we would go late into the night.

We are missing "no presence from the minister" in the motion. I recognize that Mr. Beech indicated the minister would prefer or look to come prior to the 18th, but I think we should have that in the motion, just for good hygiene and measure. This will be the third or fourth motion that includes a request of the minister's presence. Unfortunately, she has not accepted the previous three.

I think we've been pretty clear on this side of the table that this is not a majority Parliament. This is a minority Parliament, and a minority Parliament committee has requested the presence of the minister on multiple occasions, which she has declined.

If you have a majority, that's one thing, but in a minority, when a committee expresses its view and requests the presence of a minister to discuss inflation and discuss what's happening, I think it's incumbent on that minister to not ignore the invitation. It would seem to me that if the minister would like to, as is reported, potentially grow her portfolio, she should welcome the opportunity to come and answer questions from parliamentarians.

I'll leave my suggestions on some amendments to my colleague Mr. Lawrence, but this is 100% a non-starter if we do not reference the minister and request her to attend. I would recommend that it be for at least two hours. Two hours seems reasonable to me given that the Bank of Canada governor has come here at least three or four times and spent 90 minutes with us on three of those occasions, and the Deputy Prime Minister has not yet appeared to talk about inflation.

I will yield the time to my friend Mr. Lawrence or whoever is next on your list.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chambers.

MP Lawrence, you're on next. Then I have MP Morantz and MP Dzerowicz after that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would repeat the comment of my colleague that maybe we can dismiss the officials, as they have some work to do to cut 3% from their budgets according to the budget put out. Maybe we could give them that extra time to start planning for 2024 and the impending cuts that this Liberal government has put on the public service. That was without the relationship.

Once again, Mr. Chair, I would ask you to dismiss the officials, because we are not—

The Chair: MP Lawrence, I think I'm going to hold on to the witnesses. We will see how this discussion goes, but we still have some 20-odd minutes. The witnesses are here. We hope maybe we can get to their questions.

MP Lawrence, the floor is yours.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Okay.

I want to proceed in a way that is professional and that does not waste anyone's time. I would also ask, if we had unanimous consent, to suspend the meeting and allow for some further negotiation. I'm more than willing to sit down in good faith, as I have with the parliamentary secretary, whom I have tremendous respect for.

I just don't see the need.... We can continue, and I'm happy to talk for as long as I need to, but if we suspend, I'm open to having those conversations again.

The Chair: Go ahead, PS Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Could I fancy up that ask to suspend? Is there a way to get unanimous consent to continue questioning the witnesses for, say, five minutes while Philip and I have a discussion?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm okay if that's procedurally allowed.

The Chair: The clerk says yes. Okay.

Members, I'm looking for consent for that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We are going to get back to questioning the witnesses.

Mr. MacDonald, you're ceding your time to MP Chatel. Is that what I see?

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. We have MP Chatel for three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

Mr. Turcot, I want to follow up on the examples I asked you about earlier. How will the NRC help mainly small and medium-sized businesses with production and innovation? The idea is to improve their competitiveness so they can drive the economy of tomorrow.

[*English*]

Mr. Marcel Turcot: Thank you for the question. I'm going to answer in English this time.

My name is Marcel Turcot. I am the DG of policy at the National Research Council.

Essentially, the National Research Council holds a series of facilities—126 R and D facilities across the country at 24 locations. We work directly with SMEs and other Canadian companies on collaborative research products and technical services, and they can bring an innovation or a problem if they have one. They come to our facilities and hire our expert teams. Often they hire them with the assistance of another program as well so that the government system is working together to support them.

We help to work out their problem and the technology they're trying to develop, and we help them bring it up to what we call the TRL scale, the technology readiness level. They may come with a problem at mid-stage. They're still developing it, but they're not sure how to commercialize it because they are encountering an innovation problem. We will lean on our innovation team and our facility. "Facility" means, for example, our photonics lab just down on Montreal Road.

Companies that are trying to innovate in a digital space into photonics and quantum space can come to that facility, hire our team, use our facility—which they wouldn't be able to afford themselves—and work out a new product or a new process technology that leads to them having a new innovation that they can then deploy into the market. Essentially we're helping with their competitive advantage so they can compete better in the global marketplace.

• (1245)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: There was a lot of discussion about information technology, because a lot of the funding will be for investing in and modernizing facilities. Can you explain to Canadians what information technology is?

Mr. Marcel Turcot: The question is about information technology. The Canadian economy, as a global economy, is becoming increasingly digital, so often products that we were manufacturing in the 20th century are now digital in the 21st century. Information technology is essentially the process of creating a digital product, such as your phone, that could be used for digital processing or to move information technology.

In our reinvestment in our facilities, we're prioritizing a lot of digital solutions and digital innovations. For example, there's the photonics example that I was providing, which is photonic-based chips. We also do laser technologies. More importantly to your question, we have a digital technologies research centre specifically focused on, for example, developing capabilities in AI, which is the next-generation technology, as well as capabilities in quantum. As we know, quantum is an important next stage of digital technology. Essentially, information technology allows you to be globally competitive in the digital economic space.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turcot, and thank you, MP Chatel.

Now we're moving over to the Conservatives and MP Morantz, although I do see PS Beech and MP Lawrence—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: We're still going.

The Chair: They're still working. Okay.

We have MP Morantz, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the officials for being here today.

For those watching, it might be difficult to see, but when I walked into the meeting room today, I saw all these people here and I thought, wow, there's such interest in what we're doing here today. However, then I found out that there were about 50 public servants here in the room, so it burst my bubble.

I wanted to ask about division 12 and amending the Service Fees Act. Is there someone here who can respond to those questions?

Thank you, Ms. Thomas. What does this—

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm just being prudent, because I know we said five minutes, and I'm guessing we're tipping up to that on our UC. We probably just need another five, so perhaps you could keep asking the witnesses—

The Chair: Yes, PS Beech, we're going to continue with questions until you come back in the room and we hear otherwise.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you.

The Chair: MP Morantz, I think we're just over a minute into your time.

Go ahead.

Mr. Marty Morantz: What types of fees does this affect? I have a lot of questions about this. Maybe just give a few examples of what types of fees this would affect.

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: Thank you for the question. I'm Nicole Thomas, executive director in the financial management sector of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

There's a broad range of government services for which fees are charged. Some of them are for families visiting our national park system. Others are for testing of prescription drugs, ensuring safe foods for Canadians and providing import permits for goods that are sold in Canada.

Mr. Marty Morantz: You are amending the way government services.... Basically, your briefing note says:

As part of its efforts to minimize costs to Canadians, the Government is proposing to amend the way fees for government services are administered. It will do this by making changes to the legislative framework governing fees for government services.

Does this mean it is the intention of the government to raise an array of fees?

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: Essentially, when the Service Fees Act came into effect in 2017, we received feedback from departments as they implemented the requirements. What we are trying to do is streamline certain processes and introduce flexibilities to make it more cost-effective to provide these services.

• (1250)

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm having trouble putting my eyes on it, but there's something in your briefing notes about making sure that taxpayers don't carry the brunt of these costs. To me, what you are saying is that you want the costs to be borne by the people who are paying the fees.

Would that not mean it's your intention to raise certain fees, rather than having the cost subsidized out of general revenues?

Mrs. Nicole Thomas: No, the intent is to streamline certain processes. As an example, in the way the legislation is currently written, departments are required to do an annual adjustment for CPI. We had an experience when that adjustment was a reduction of 0.2%, so one of the proposed changes is to reduce the burden of applying that by deferring if it doesn't hit a 1% threshold in any given year.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I want to go back to the sanctions legislation. The official is still in the room. I thank you for that.

Again, in terms of Bill C-47, if it's adopted, how would the Government of Canada's interpretation of "deemed ownership" of property by a sanctioned person compare to the way that Canada's allies determine ownership of property held or controlled by an entity?

Ms. Marie-Josée Langlois: Thank you very much.

As before, I am Marie-Josée Langlois, director general in the strategic policy branch at Global Affairs Canada.

In terms of the provisions on ownership and control in the sanctions legislation, those provisions have been there from the beginning. The dealing ban talks about the fact that Canadians cannot deal with property that is owned or controlled directly or indirectly by listed entities.

The amendments that are proposed at this time are meant to clarify those provisions. They clarify that the properties of the subsidiaries or related companies are deemed to be the property of the listed entities, and that there are tests or criteria that Canadians can use to assess whether they can deal with an entity or not.

This is similar to what is found in other countries' sanctions legislation, for example, in the U.S. or the U.K.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Are we out of time? Is that it?

Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Yes, thank you.

Now we're going to the Liberals and MP Chatel, please, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question about the Canada growth fund, which is in division 32 of Bill C-47, but it looks like we're missing a group today. I

don't think we have anyone available to answer that question. It's fine. I have other questions. I'll turn to division 26 and the Patent Act.

Mr. Chhabra, much has been made of how long it takes to issue patents, which are crucial to support Canadian business innovation. I was speaking with Mr. Turcot earlier about the importance of innovation. Can you tell us more about division 26? How will the proposed changes expedite the issuing of patents?

Mr. Samir Chhabra (Director General, Marketplace Framework Policy Branch, Department of Industry): Thank you for your question.

I am Samir Chhabra, director general of marketplace framework policy at Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.

[English]

I'm going to answer your question in English. It's a little bit technical.

The changes that are being proposed to the Patent Act are really to implement changes that were agreed to under the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement, CUSMA. The nature of the changes is regarding the availability of an additional patent term when an unreasonable delay occurs. CUSMA holds that an unreasonable delay occurs when a patent applicant has to wait for longer than three years after their examination begins or more than five years after they initially file.

This allows for the extension of a patent term to accommodate for any delays that might have been on the part of the Canadian Intellectual Property Office during the administration of it.

What that means is that, if CIPO takes longer than the prescribed amount of time, which will be worked out through regulations to follow, the applicant would be enabled to have an extension of their patent term that is equal to the amount of time that was taken on the part of CIPO that was beyond what's considered a reasonable amount of time in the CUSMA.

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Do you think those measures will stimulate innovation, or is it more technical than that?

Mr. Samir Chhabra: That's a good question.

[English]

I think it's fair to say that what it will do is provide the appropriate incentives to maintain a well-functioning patent application and review system, which certainly could be supportive of innovation.

It also ensures that those who put in the research and development effort and the resources required to support research and development are better assured of having an appropriate amount of time under the law to take advantage of that innovation, which, of course, would be supportive of continued investment.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: After spending some time with Mr. Turcot, they turn to you and they are well served. Thank you, Mr. Chhabra.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to give the remainder of my time to Ms. Dzerowicz, for her 42 questions.

[English]

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have 44.

My question is about modernizing the National Research Council, so this is for whoever is able to respond to that.

It says, as part of our notes here, that budget 2023's proposed legislative amendments to the NRC Act provide flexibilities that are critical to ensuring that the NRC has the flexibility it needs to speed up capital purchases to match the speed of business and provide its partners with the timely access to specialized facilities and expertise they need to succeed.

I have two questions there. The \$962 million that we're investing in this, what problem is it seeking to solve and how are we defining the speed of business, since that is what we're targeting to match?

Mr. Marcel Turcot: Regarding your first question, it's the result of a four-year study we undertook at the NRC that included a panel of peer reviewers of Canadian international experts in academics that looked at our current facilities footprint and the state of those facilities across the country. What it found was that there was deferred maintenance of upwards of \$700 million because of an underinvestment over time in our facilities.

The \$962 million, which was announced in the fall economic statement, is meant to revitalize those facilities to bring them up to modern standards and to better allow them to work with innovators.

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Beech. I apologize to the witness who was in the middle of an answer there.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, I'm very glad that we were able to get some more witness testimony, but according to the UC motion that we passed, I'd like to return back to the motion if we can, please.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Can we just allow him...?

The Chair: Members, we are going to be returning back to the motion so at this time—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Can we have him finish his response, please?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Marcel Turcot: Thank you. I'll be brief.

What we found is that often some of our partners are waiting for some of our procurements to take place, some of our purchases to take place, in order to do a collaborative project with them. For example, if a company wants to come in, and we need a new piece of

equipment to do testing or to help them with an innovative product, they're waiting on us to procure that piece of equipment. These legislative amendments are so that we can work at their pace and their speed so that we're not the delay. We can be a partner in real time with them to deliver on their project.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turcot.

We appreciate all of the witnesses who are with us. Thank you for all of your hard work on the budget. Thank you for coming before committee with all of your testimony, all of the questions that you've answered and those that you'll be getting back to members on that you weren't able to answer at this time.

We apologize for any of the interruptions as we brought forward a motion.

Thank you very much, witnesses. You are free to go.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Before the point of order, we had PS Beech. We are on the motion, as PS Beech said.

MP Chambers, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Do we require UC to go back to the motion?

The Chair: We do not, so we are back to the motion we all agreed to.

PS Beech, the floor is yours.

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm good to vote.

● (1300)

The Chair: I see MP Lawrence and MP Morantz. I think I got them in that order. I'm not sure. It was pretty close. I'll give the nod to MP Lawrence and then MP Morantz.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to say that hundreds of billions of dollars are going to be spent. If I were the minister in charge of the budget, I would welcome the opportunity to talk to the committee and explain all these great things—including, in question period, when she notably but somewhat inaccurately characterized what I said in the finance committee when I said the naming of the GST rebate was a “cheap marketing” trick, which I stand by.

It's not the GST rebate. Conservatives have, of course, supported the GST rebate at numerous times, including this time. In fact, we stood up and let it go through all levels and all stages and passed it so we could get the GST rebate to the most vulnerable Canadians. Conservatives will always be on the side of tax reduction and tax cuts.

I know the Minister of Finance is probably watching this right now with intensity and curiosity. I would throw the warmest of welcomes to her to come to this committee. I'm sure she can count on some strong questions, but very cordial and respectful questions, as to the position she has obtained and the position she holds in the Canadian government.

As I said, with the warmest of greetings I would request her presence here before the finance committee. We have invited her a number of times, including on the inflation study, and she has failed to appear.

Once again, if I were the Minister of Finance—and clearly I am not—I would for sure want to be in front of the Canadian public, just like the Governor of the Bank of Canada, who has responded to all of our invitations and who has been very open and forthcoming with this committee and not in any way afraid or nervous about talking to our committee, because he realizes that ultimately he's not talking to the finance committee; he's talking to the representatives of the Canadian people.

I believe that democracy really compels all of our public officials to talk and engage, even with people we disagree with. I know that in my constituency office, if I get someone who has a different view than mine I actually have them put at the front of the line because I believe it's through diversity of thought and through various opinions that we actually are able to grow and expand our own mindsets going forward.

Maybe I'll start getting into the substance of the budget as it were.

Mr. Chair, how long do we have resources for?

The Chair: My understanding is that we have an extra 10 minutes or so, and then we are asking the whips for more resources.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much.

I certainly do hope that the whips grant that because I will enjoy having a conversation with my constituents and the Canadian people moving forward.

Let's start maybe with what I was hoping to see in the budget and the budget implementation act. Conservatives really came into this looking for three things, one of which was tangible support for Canadians through more powerful paycheques and taking less of those paycheques, because it's extremely challenging.

I had—I can say his name I guess in committee—Kevin Lamoureux challenge me when I talked a little bit about the marginal tax rate. He didn't seem to know that there are Canadians who are earning well less than \$50,000 who are paying a marginal tax rate in excess of 50%. That has been characterized as the war on work, and I think it really is.

Can you imagine earning \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year, and because of the housing crisis your cost of rent has gone up to \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month, so the after-tax income you are left with is maybe half? Then for every dollar you earn over that \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$60,000 you are giving up more than 50% of that to the government.

Let's say you're offered that overtime shift for \$20 per hour or whatever it is. Now you have to arrange child care. Maybe now instead of making food at home you now have to go pick something up, so there are additional costs in that. These are all of the costs that are associated with those additional hours, and you're only going to keep maybe 40¢ on the dollar or 30¢ on the dollar.

The Liberals are great at giving themselves a pat on the back and saying, "Well done, man. We really took that money from A and gave it to B. We should be heroes for that." The reality is that they have absolutely zero dollars on their side. That's all Canadian taxpayers' money. In order to give something, you have to take something first.

The war on work continues on that side, as we have single mothers who often have to pay more than a marginal tax rate who are earning less than \$50,000 a year and who are often paying more than 50%, meaning 50¢ on every dollar they earn goes to the government.

Seniors who are receiving the GIS, or the guaranteed income supplement, are also often giving up...because the GIS claws back at 50% irrespective of even income tax, which then starts at \$14,000 or \$15,000. They are already starting at a marginal tax rate of 50%. Then you add income tax on top of that, so you're looking at 60% or 70%. A senior may be only keeping 30¢ on every dollar they are earning at the massive income level of \$20,000 a year.

These are shocking numbers, and I can't believe that this government and other folks in the media don't shine a brighter light on the war on work that's currently being engaged in by these Liberals and this Liberal government. We are penalizing people who are trying desperately to make it to the middle class.

Winston Churchill once described how a country taxing itself into prosperity is a bit like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by pulling the handle. I don't know if anyone's ever characterized so well what this Liberal government is attempting to do. They are pulling on that handle so hard, and they are in complete frustration and confusion as to why we have one of the lowest rates of innovation, productivity and GDP rate growth predicted in the OECD, because they are just reefing and reefing on that handle. They don't understand why they are not lifting things up. They don't understand why our housing has doubled over the last eight years. They don't understand why the cost of rent has doubled and why we are not getting more powerful paycheques.

The second thing the Conservatives were looking for was fiscal restraint. I will hand it to this government. In the fall economic statement, they actually showed a path—granted it was five years out—to a balanced budget. It's amazing, in just four or five months that path has completely disappeared. It has disappeared into the ether. Instead we have deficits as far as the eye can see.

• (1305)

According to Tiff Macklem, interest rates are going to stay high. That means we'll see, likely within the next couple of years, that the cost of borrowing will exceed the total health care transfers. We'll be spending more on interest than we will be spending on health care. We need a path back to sustainability.

If you remember, Mr. Chair, about four or five months ago, the finance minister said, we have “a line we will not cross”. The debt-to-GDP ratio will not increase, no way, no how. That can't happen in Prime Minister Trudeau's Canada. It will not happen.

Well, less than six months later, guess what: We are now forecasting that the debt-to-GDP ratio will increase.

They say, “Hold on, Phil, don't worry. We've got a plan. In two or three years, we are going to cut departments by 3%. We are going to get that debt-to-GDP ratio under control. We're going to see after this mild recession, so mild of a recession that you can't even feel it, that this economy is going to roar back. Don't worry about it. We're going to have more revenue than you can imagine. We've got these 3% spending cuts.”

As we heard from officials today, we're less than six months from when this government believes those spending cuts are going to start, and not one of them has a plan. Not one of them could tell me one dollar that they were going to reduce their spending by. We see this over and over again. This government continues to get an “A” for announcements, but an “F” for follow-up. We do not have a plan.

I'm curious, too, as to whether the strike was priced into the budget. Will that be an additional cost? The negotiation took over two years and required a work stoppage to get this government to a serious bargaining position finally. Will that make it even worse?

We have right now.... I refuse, with all respect, to take with any seriousness a budget forecast that is anything more than a year in advance. I suspect that will change, just as it did from the fall economic statement. As you remember, six months ago, we were going to have a balanced budget in five years. Now we have deficits as far as the eye can see. Six months ago, we weren't going to have a recession, and now we're going to have a recession. They told us we were going to have deflation. We had inflation.

You'll have to excuse my skepticism with respect to this ability to forecast anything. They could not tell us whether there was going to be inflation. They said deflation. They told us that there was going to be a balanced budget, and now we have deficits for as far as the eye can see.

We now have a forecasted debt that's going to go over \$1.3 trillion. Even if we took out the COVID spending, this government has dramatically increased expenditures since 2008. There's no reason why we couldn't have a meaningful approach to balancing the budget. In fact, they showed that we could do it. They showed in the fall economic statement that there was a way to balance the budget. They're continuing their reckless tax-and-spend policies. Once again, they're standing in that bucket reefing on the handle, trying to pull it up. In complete frustration and confusion, they don't understand why they can't get that bucket up. They're just reefing on it as hard as they can.

It boggles my mind. Honestly, when I sit in the House of Commons and hear these Liberals once again praising themselves on spending other people's money.... It's not their money. It started with a single mom in Orono, with the steelworker in Hamilton, the oil and gas worker in Alberta. Those are the folks who generate income. Governments don't generate income. They don't generate

value. They can divide equity, which is an important role, and I don't think any of us would dispute that. However, our future prosperity will never come from a government program. It will never come from a regulation. It will never come from a tax policy. It will come from the people of Canada.

• (1310)

Canadians are the engine that drives our economy. In lots of cases, the best thing the government can do is just get out of the way and let Canadians do what they do best, which is to work hard, generate great ideas, innovate, reinvest in the economy and grow our economy.

We have entered into a potential economic decline. We're forecast by the OECD to be the worst in the OECD over the next 20 years with respect to capital investment. That's scary. Capital investment means buying machinery. If you can imagine, we have two factories, factory A and factory B. Factory A invests in the equipment it needs. Now it can produce the same level or better quality of product, but it can produce it at half the cost. You can imagine that if factory B hasn't done that investment, it's really only a matter of time until factory A puts factory B out of business.

We are in danger of being factory B, because we're not making the capital investments. That's a direct result of this government's policies. We are not incentivizing business. We are not encouraging. We are not rewarding businesses to make those investments back into the production of their goods and services. Instead, this government is taking a larger and larger piece of the economy. We are strangling, starving out and depriving the private sector of oxygen so that they can't do what they need, which is to reinvest in that factory A to make sure we have state-of-the-art factories.

The world is changing, too. The pace at which we need to invest in innovation has never been greater. We have artificial intelligence. We have biohealth sciences growing at tremendous speeds. We need a government that's agile and that's able to put in place the type of regulations and legislative framework needed for us to be a leader in these technologies going forward. Instead, we get more of the same: tax and spend, tax and spend, tax and spend.

We know that, with the government, from the very first promise that the budget would balance itself.... As Prime Minister Harper said, there would be these itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny little deficits. Guess what. Prime Minister Harper was right. Those deficits became perennial deficits, and you see that. Keynesian economics will tell you that when times are good—times are good—we need to save money as a government. We didn't do that. We just spent. We spent the cupboard dry. As Prime Minister Harper said, those tiny, itsy-bitsy deficits, so teeny you can't see them, became larger and larger deficits.

When we then came to a significant challenge with COVID, we'd already spent the cupboard dry. Instead of just spending on the COVID relief, which Conservatives supported, this government spent on anything and everything, including spending nearly \$1 billion on WE Charity. They spent and they spent and they spent. Now we're in a continuing deficit position of tens and tens of billions of dollars going forward. Our debt is forecast to be over \$1.3 trillion.

Conservatives were expecting to see a path back to financial sustainability. Instead, we saw the casting aside of the fiscal anchor that had just been adopted a year earlier. Now we're once again adrift, without a fiscal anchor and without a fiscal plan. We'll just continue to spend, spend, spend.

We know what that results in, because the leader of the official opposition forecast it. In fact, I can remember him in the House talking about the possibility of inflation, and then what the finance minister said: "No, no, no, we're in fear of deflation. What don't you understand, Mr. Poilievre? It's deflation we need to worry about."

It turns out that the leader of the official opposition was right. We got inflation that we hadn't seen for 20 years. The more this government spends, the more inflation we have. If there's anything I could share with my colleagues across the aisle, it would be that very basic, fundamental principle of economics: The more the government spends, the more inflation we'll get and the more things will cost.

● (1315)

I'm sorry, Marty. Are you on the list here?

I'd feel bad taking up all this time. I can see my colleague to my left here—

Mr. Marty Morantz: Don't feel bad.

Mr. Philip Lawrence:—welling up with excitement, so I'll give some of my time to Marty. Please don't take too much time as I'd like to return back on the speaking order.

The Chair: MP Morantz was next on the list. Then I have MP Dzerowicz, MP Viersen and MP Fast.

MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague Mr. Lawrence for his bang on remarks. We're having this problem in the finance committee today because, ironically, the finance minister won't commit to coming to the finance committee to answer questions about her own budget. I think it's important that Canadians know what it is we're talking about.

I want to try to follow the rules, Mr. Chair, as much as I possibly can. Since we are debating a motion, I thought we should take a few minutes to go over the wording of the motion so that everyone watching can understand what it is we're debating about.

The motion begins with this:

That the committee continue its pre-study of Bill C-47, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 28, by:

(a) Inviting witnesses to appear on the contents of Bill C-47 during meetings scheduled the weeks of May 1, May 8, and May 15, 2023, and that;

Members of the committee submit their prioritized witness lists for the study of Bill C-47 to the clerk of the committee by no later than Wednesday, May 3, 2023, at 12:00 p.m., and that these lists be distributed to members of the committee as soon as possible;

(b) Moving to clause-by-clause—

For those watching, "clause-by-clause" essentially means we literally go through the bill, discussing each and every clause and voting on every clause. That's some of the terminology we like to use here on the Hill when we're dealing with legislation.

—review of Bill C-47 no later than Thursday, May 25, 2023, at 11:00 a.m., provided that the bill is referred to the committee on or before Thursday, May 18, 2023, and that;

i. amendments be submitted to the clerk of the committee in both official languages [by] no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 19, 2023;

ii. the clerk of the committee write immediately to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee and any independent members to inform them of the study of Bill C-47 by the committee and to invite them to prepare and submit any proposed amendments to Bill C-47 which they would suggest that the committee consider during the clause-by-clause study of the Bill;

Now this particular portion is very important because, for those watching, they may not realize that it is generally officially recognized parties that sit on the committee. For example, this committee has 12 members. There are six Liberal members, four Conservative members, a Bloc member and an NDP member, but there could also theoretically be other parties—there aren't right now—in the House that are official and that might not have a member sitting on the committee. That could happen. There's the Green Party, but they're not actually an official party. They are not a member of the committee, so technically, under our rules, they're independent members even though, out of deference to them, we call them the Green Party.

What this clause is speaking to is giving those types of members notices. Also, there are independent members who deserve the right to be able to come make submissions for recommended amendments to the committee. Therefore, (b)(ii) is an extremely important measure to make sure the democratic process will be followed and be inclusive of members who are either a member of an official party that is not represented on the committee or independent members who have no party affiliation. That's what that particular clause is trying to deal with.

Let me move on. There are a few more points here:

(c) If Bill C-47 is referred to the committee by the House during the subject matter study of the Bill, all witness testimony, evidence and documentation received in public in relation to its subject matter study of Bill C-47 be deemed received by the committee in the context of its legislative study of Bill C-47;

● (1320)

(d) Subject to the approval of the recognized parties' whips, and the availability of meeting slots from the House of Commons, the committee hold as many additional meetings as possible with the goal of accomplishing at least 20 hours of study prior to the beginning of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill;

(e) That the Chair of the Committee write, as promptly as possible, to the Chairs of the following standing committees to invite them to study the subject matter of the following provisions of Bill C-47, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 28, 2023:

I'm going to go through these letters, but I think this is an important point that I want to circle back to. It's something I raised earlier in the meeting. It's very important that Canadians who are watching this meeting right now understand this. Budget implementation bills are supposed to be about the budget. They're supposed to be about revenues and expenditures, economic policy, fiscal policy and that kind of thing.

The problem is that a massive part of this bill has nothing to do with any of those things. They call it an omnibus bill, and it's really an opportunity for government, politicians and public servants to basically get into legislation things that they should really be trying to get into legislation through the normal course, through the ordinary process of introducing a bill, having it go through the various readings, the committee stage, third reading and then over to the Senate.

This omnibus method is essentially a shortcut, particularly in a budget bill, which is essentially considered to be a confidence motion. The reason that's important is that a confidence motion is a bill for which, if the government loses the vote on it, it loses the confidence of the House and in all likelihood an election ensues.

I think public servants and politicians who put those types of non-budgetary matters in the bill think that it will slide by, and it's going to pass because we have the costly coalition. The NDP's going to support it no matter what, because they're basically not an opposition party anymore and they're just going to support this budget. This is an opportunity for them to get something passed, to short-circuit the process, essentially, to get something passed that they might not be able to get passed in the ordinary course. That's really unfortunate. I'm really not a big believer in these types of bills, but I'm not the only one. In fact, I have very well-known company on this opinion. I'll tell you what he said before I tell you who said it.

He said:

Omnibus bills—I'd like to say I wouldn't use them, period. There will always be big bills, but they need to be thematically and substantively linked in all their different pieces so that they form a piece of legislation. The kitchen-sink approach here is a real worry to me.

There's also this:

Stephen Harper has also used omnibus bills to prevent Parliament from properly reviewing and debating his proposals. We will change the House of Commons Standing Orders to bring an end to this undemocratic practice.

Do you know who said that, Mr. Chair? It was Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who said that.

He and I are of the same mind on this one. There's not a lot that we agree upon, but it begs the question of why he would say that back in 2013 and now be doing the exact same thing he said he would never do. He called it undemocratic.

I shouldn't be surprised because there are so many things. They said, we'll plant two billion trees; it didn't happen. The debt-to-GDP ratio is going to go down; it didn't happen. We will have electoral reform. This was the last first-past-the-post system election. We should be worried about deflation not inflation. Interest rates are going to stay low. We're going to have the budget balanced by 2019. Don't worry; vote for us. By the way, you get more back from the carbon tax rebate than you pay in carbon tax. We know all that's

not true, so I shouldn't be surprised when the Prime Minister says something for political convenience and then literally does exactly the opposite thing.

• (1325)

That gets me to the rest of this motion, because what this bill ironically tries to do is deal with all these non-budgetary rules, things like the style and title of the King of England. Some of them may be laudable goals, like experimentation on animals and things like that, but I don't know what that has to do with a budget bill.

What they try to do to get around that is say to us that they recognize that the expertise to study all sorts of things in this budget bill doesn't really exist at the finance committee, so they're suggesting that we send letters to a bunch of other committees and ask them to study those types of things. For example, earlier today I was asking about the amendments to the sanctions legislation, or what's called the Special Economic Measures Act and the Magnitsky act.

I was surprised to see in this motion that, although there are referrals to a number of different committees, there's no referral to the foreign affairs committee, which would be the right place to study those provisions. I don't see that in this memo, unless I'm missing it.

That also begs this question: What else isn't in here? In part 4, there are 39 different pieces of legislation, most of which have actually nothing to do with the budget.

What they're doing is saying that they recognize that, so we're going to send the immigration stuff to the immigration committee and the foreign affairs stuff to the foreign affairs committee. We'll send the national defence piece to the national defence committee. We'll send the natural resources stuff to the natural resources committee. We'll send the environmental stuff to the environment committee. However, so many of these things have actually nothing to do with revenues, expenditures, fiscal policy or economics.

It's just a kitchen sink that the government has decided to throw this stuff into to try to get it through the legislative process and make it very difficult for members of Parliament to scrutinize all these different pieces of legislation. I think I mentioned that, in the briefing notes of the department for dealing with some of the border stuff, the briefing note itself was 21 pages long. It should be its own piece of legislation.

I have a lot more to say about this, Mr. Chair, but I know that my colleague, Mr. Chambers, is chomping at the bit to finish off his arguments. I am prepared to cede the floor to him since I don't see the Liberal member here.

• (1330)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

Yes, MP Dzerowicz is not here at this time.

We have MP Viersen and then I have MP Fast.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: We'll go to me first then, unless they're really anxious to go.

The Chair: Okay.

MP Viersen and MP Fast are okay with that, so we'll go over to MP Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much.

If Ms. Dzerowicz does come in, out of generosity and the spirit of goodwill, I'm more than happy to have her interrupt me and put some excellent comments on the record here.

I did want to go over the importance of the legislative process and thoroughly examining legislation. I guess I'd start by thanking the 48 officials who are here today.

I had a private member's bill. That's why I missed some time at foreign affairs and certainly missed my time here with one of the best committees, I think, in all of Parliament. My private member's bill was small. I think it was fewer than 10 pages, and we had four meetings with extensive consultations and discussions, and many amendments from all parties. That was just one small private member's bill.

When we look at an omnibus budget like this, which has tens if not hundreds of pages in it, I think it's important—in fact, it's critical—that legislators are able to do their jobs. We're talking about billions and billions of dollars that are being spent. It's critical that as legislators we have the time to review and understand that.

Quite frankly we all missed, at least in the opposition anyway, what was in the budget when it came to the deferred prosecution agreement with respect to SNC-Lavalin. We, like all legislators, need to make sure that never happens again. We need to make sure that we have the appropriate consultations.

Just for my private member's bill, which, as I said, is just a couple of mere pages, we had officials testify for probably hours when you combine them on just this relatively small provision. When we're looking at a budget of this size, hundreds of billions of dollars, to me, as I believe one of the members already said.... I think it was Gabriel who said that we really require hundreds of hours on this. I think that's a fair comment when you look at the billions of dollars that would be spent.

Let me just go through and discuss a little bit this notice of motion, as my colleague did. I, of course, respect and like my colleague, but I think he was a little too brief in discussing some of this.

We're inviting witnesses to appear during regular meetings on May 1, May 8 and May 15. Those are our three regular meetings, where we sit from 11 to one o'clock. I would have expected maybe the parliamentary secretary to work with the chair and set out additional hours so we could get the maximum amount of time possible to discuss this. Honestly, it seems a little odd that we're struggling so much for resources.

It was very surprising to me that we weren't able to get an emergency debate with respect to The Globe and Mail's story respecting the member from Wellington—Halton Hills, Michael Chong, and the acts by a diplomat in the consular office in Toronto. We weren't able to get parliamentary resources for that.

It would seem that this government is bent on burning resources, as we had a relatively reasonable request to move forward with this

and have the minister speak for two hours on this, but the finance minister evidently doesn't have time for the Canadian people, which we see, as she would not spend two hours on a budget that's spending hundreds of billions of dollars.

The finance committee is fine—I understand. I may be of no particular significance, but I do represent 100,000 people from Northumberland—Peterborough South. I would have thought that the finance minister would be willing to give two hours of her day. I know she's extremely busy. She works extremely hard, but two hours in the scope of a year to discuss hundreds of billions of dollars in expenditures that will guide the government financially for the next year seems like a relatively modest request.

● (1335)

If we look at the rounds of questions, at six minutes—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Chair, I have just a quick point of order with respect to my colleague.

The Chair: On a point of order, we have MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess because we are venturing out into long-talk territory, my question is this: Am I to take from his remarks that if there were a commitment from the minister to appear on the bill for two hours, he'd be prepared to otherwise pass the motion in its current form with that addition? Or are there other things he would need to see changed about this motion in order for us to have a vote?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It's not a point of order, but I respect my colleague tremendously. If hypothetically we were—perhaps it's dangerous to negotiate in public, as I've heard multiple times in the last couple of weeks—to get the minister for two hours, and instead of starting the clause-by-clause on Thursday just doing it three days later, on the Monday, my sense is that we would be able to move forward with this in a meaningful way.

We respect the will of the people. On our side of the aisle, we understand that the Liberal Party won an election and they entered into a supply and confidence agreement with the New Democratic Party, so we just want to make sure that the Canadian people have the ability to hear their finance minister for all of two hours. We would just, in the regular schedule of business, delay the bill for all of three days. Then we can all move on with our lives.

I stand to be corrected—and if the parliamentary secretary or anyone on their side wants to correct me, I'm more than willing to be—but my understanding is that the deputy leader and finance minister is unwilling to give two hours to the Canadian people, to the representatives of the Canadian people. We were all—Ms. Chateau, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Baker—duly elected, and we are all representatives of the Canadian people. She's unwilling to give us two hours—which might be, I don't know, 10 to 15 rounds of questions at most—to answer the questions we are duly elected to ask.

Yes, Mr. Blaikie, essentially all we're asking for is three days and two hours. I don't think that's an extraordinary ask.

I'll continue on, though. I would love it if the parliamentary secretary would get up at this point and say that this sounds like an official opposition doing its job, working hard for the Canadian public and still trying to be productive and work with the other elected representatives in the spirit of collaboration and collegiality, but we'll carry forward.

• (1340)

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Come on, Terry.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: The next part is, "Members of the committee submit their prioritized witness lists for the study of Bill C-47 to the clerk...no later than Wednesday, May 3rd, 2023, at 12 p.m., and that these lists be distributed to members...as soon as possible."

I would actually take this opportunity.... We still have a couple of days before this motion is passed to get witness lists in to the clerk. I would make a call-out to the folks in my riding. If anyone has been affected by inflation, as many of you have, and you wish to talk, please.... We believe in a democratic process. If you have a good story to tell, we'll certainly do our best to put your name forward for our study here at the finance committee. I'm looking forward to having some great witnesses.

The Conservatives are willing to extend hours and work through the break week to get this done, as I said, in the spirit of good faith, collaboration and congeniality, and in acknowledgement that the Liberals did take the most seats, even if they didn't win the popular vote in the last election.

Unfortunately, two hours is just too long for the Deputy Prime Minister to spend with the people of Canada regarding the finance portfolio she oversees. I guess it's too long for her to come down and talk to the Canadian people. I'm sure she believes she has more important things to do.

I'll go back to the motion, which says, "Moving to clause-by-clause review of Bill C-47 no later than Thursday, May 25, 2023 at 11:00 a.m." As I said, we would like to bring in the clause-by-clause just three or four days later, on the Monday, so we can do it in the regular course of the meeting. The Conservatives have absolutely no problem sitting throughout the break week to make sure that we can get as much testimony on record as possible and so that we hear from Canadians. We believe that as elected representatives, one of our critical obligations to the people who elected us is to engage with them, talk to them and listen to them.

Then, of course, we have the usual with respect to amendments, which would be on Friday, May 19. If we did move back the date, we would probably move that back as housekeeping, going forward from there.

The motion continues with this:

- ii. the clerk of the committee write immediately to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee and any independent members to inform them of the study of Bill C-47 by the committee and to invite them to prepare and submit any proposed amendments to Bill C-47 which they would suggest that the committee consider during the clause-by-clause study of the Bill

Of course, we do have a number of independents. We used to have Jody Wilson-Raybould, but she was thrown out of the Liberal

caucus for speaking truth to power. She decided not to re-up, which is unfortunate because I thought she was an excellent member of Parliament.

I'll continue with the motion:

(c) If Bill C-47 is referred to the committee by the House during the subject matter study of the Bill, all witness testimony, evidence and documentation received in public in relation to its subject matter study of Bill C-47 be deemed received by the committee in the context of its legislative study of Bill C-47;

(d) Subject to the approval of the recognized parties' whips, and the availability of meeting slots from the House of Commons, the committee hold as many additional meetings as possible with the goal of accomplishing at least 20 hours of study prior to the beginning of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill;

In the spirit of good faith, the Conservatives are willing to work with this government, but I really believe that 20 hours would be the absolute minimum. I can't overstate the amount of money that the government has going out the door. It's billions and billions of dollars. Think about that. How many billions are being spent and are getting out the door for every hour of witness testimony?

• (1345)

I really believe that the more consultation and engagement in the democratic process we have, the better off Canadians are. Then we can find issues and we can find ways to improve things. No person—no government—is perfect, and this government is certainly far from perfect.

I think it's great to have discussion, to have NDP ideas, Green Party ideas and Conservative Party ideas, so that we can improve this budget. Twenty hours, to me, is the very minimum of what we should be utilizing to discuss this—not to delay or in any way obstruct the process, but to make sure that as many voices as possible are heard.

Next is (e), which recommends this:

(e) That the Chair of the Committee write, as promptly as possible, to the Chairs of the following standing committees to invite them to study the subject matter of the following provisions of Bill C-47, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament....

I think my colleague Marty talked about the fact that we're not studying the proposed changes with respect to sanctions in the foreign affairs.... I believe that's correct, and I think it should be something we add there. Just in spending the last four or five meetings with the foreign affairs committee, I know they're working extremely hard, and the sanctions are a critical part of that.

In fact, in my own private member's bill, Bill C-281, we sought to give Parliament some say and some power with respect to the imposition of Magnitsky sanctions. Bill C-281 would give Parliament the ability to ask the government to report back to Parliament with respect to individuals who Parliament believes should be sanctioned but have not been. The Magnitsky sanctions have been, by nearly all accounts, underused in Canada. We're not seeking a full parliamentary or legislative trigger, as actually exists in many different countries around the world. All we're asking for is some additional transparency and for them to come back to the foreign affairs committee and report that.

I was very impressed with the level of expertise of many of the members of the foreign affairs committee, and I think that studying those changes in the foreign affairs committee makes a lot of sense, as we have some real experts. Of course, among them is Michael Chong, a parliamentarian renowned both for his ability to communicate and for his incredible level of knowledge on foreign affairs and everything relating to foreign affairs.

We have the various divisions—which I think is a good step for this committee—to divide up the budget for committees that have some greater expertise. Certainly, we all try to spend as much time as possible gaining knowledge and understanding in various fields, but when you look at this and you see an omnibus budget like this.... I know that the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party complained about omnibus bills when the Conservatives were in power, but they have everything but the kitchen sink in here.

Let me read off what's included here, just some of the areas that are included in this budget. We have the status of persons with disabilities, and skills and social development; citizenship and immigration; health; industry; national defence; government operations; natural resources; industry and technology; the environment; procedure; indigenous topics; and international trade. Those are just some of the topics covered in this massive omnibus budget.

I sincerely believe that it should be an obligation for all of us as parliamentarians to cover these subjects in the depth that they require. This will affect people's lives. This could have a significant effect on many Canadians. The least we should be doing as parliamentarians is ardently studying these important changes to the Canadian budget.

The next part, (f), calls for “recommendations in relation to the provisions considered by them be provided in the form of a letter to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance, in both official languages, no later than 12:00 p.m. on Thursday May 18, 2023”. That date is really coming up. As I said, we as Conservatives would like to work forward and just get to work so that we make sure we can get through this substantial amount of work and testimony as quickly as possible, and that, in the spirit of collaboration, we can get the maximum number of testimonies and conversations on the record. That way as many voices as possible can be heard.

• (1350)

Paragraph (g) says, “if a standing committee listed in (e) chooses not to consider the subject matter of the provisions, it advise the Chair of the committee by letter, in both official languages, no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 12, 2023.” I would hope that all committees would have the ability to study these important provisions, but other things could certainly get in the way of that.

The other part of this budget implementation act that is critical is the context that we are in right now in Canada. We're facing some significant economic headwinds, not the least of which is our productivity numbers, which are lagging behind other countries'. Our dollars earned per hour and GDP contribution per hour of work, in other words, are only \$55. That's lower than in the United States. That's lower than in Ireland. That's lower than in Switzerland—considerably, I might add. There are countries blessed with far fewer resources than we are blessed with that are just, quite frankly,

eating our lunch when it comes to productivity, innovation and capital investment. We need to get those issues solved.

One of the things that I want to ask officials and other witnesses is what in this budget will enable greater productivity. What in this budget will really put us on the map with respect to innovation?

We have, in my opinion, the smartest, hardest-working people in all the world right here in Canada. Unfortunately, we're not enabling them. We're not facilitating. We're not putting them in the position to maximize their potential. In fact, some of them are being scooped up and taken down to the United States or to countries in Europe where they can ply their trade.

I talked to one gentleman who is an absolute genius. He's already contributed to the creation of multi-million dollar and multi-billion dollar companies. He's an immigrant to Canada, loves Canada and is a supporter of our country. He is a terrific individual and human being. He said it was great news that he made those million-dollar and billion-dollar companies, but he said with great sadness that he had to do it in the United States. He just didn't have the support he needed in Canada to make that happen.

This is really a condemnation of this Liberal government's failure to put in place the framework that he knew we needed in order to succeed. We don't have to be just branch plants. Branch plants are great, and I certainly appreciate every single manufacturing job we can bring to Northumberland—Peterborough South, the greatest riding in all the world. We certainly appreciate that, but in addition to attracting manufacturing and services, there's no reason why we shouldn't have headquarters and R and D right here in Canada. We have great professors and we have great universities, but we're losing intellectual property.

Too often what happens is that ideas are generated here in Canada but are not commercialized here. What happens, if you can believe this—and this happens over and over and over again—is that ideas are generated at our great post-secondary education facilities and are created and generated by a great population of inventors and entrepreneurs, but then, because we don't have the intellectual property framework, because we're overly burdened when it comes to taxation and regulation and because we're not agile enough as an economy, those ideas leave our shores. Oftentimes people might go down to Silicon Valley, Europe or other places in the world where they can find a more supportive framework, a place where they believe they can turn their ideas into a product or service that will change the world and will make our world a better place.

• (1355)

The sad part, though, for Canadians is that those products and services, which were created in Canada by Canadians, are sold back to us at a premium. It's often that we're pushing aside some of the jobs that create the greatest amount of GDP per worker. That's one of the reasons why our GDP per worker lags behind that of the United States, among many other OECD countries. We're not capturing those ideas. We're not keeping some of those great jobs here in Canada.

The average is about \$50 to \$55. That's what the Canadian worker contributes to the GDP per hour. In clean Canadian energy, it's about \$500. That's 10 times more. This Liberal government is doing everything it can to compromise, limit, reduce and eliminate clean Canadian energy from our economy, which will have a tremendous impact not just in Alberta or in Saskatchewan, where many of those resources are located.... Those resources fuel our economy. They are really a bright light in our economy.

While we struggle with our productivity per GDP per hour in many sectors, we don't struggle in Canadian energy. That's \$500. Every hour a worker out in Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick or Newfoundland is working in the energy sector, they're contributing \$500 to the GDP, whereas the average is \$50. This is something we need to build on, not eliminate.

It's incredibly troubling when the government doesn't acknowledge the contribution of the great folks in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Alberta, Saskatchewan and, of course, in my very own province of Ontario as well. In fact, they're compromising it. They're making it more difficult to get our product to market.

In the regulatory regime, we will have many critical minerals that will be important to the economy in the future. Whether it's lithium for batteries or other natural resources located in Canada, we need to do everything we can to encourage the development and extraction of those important minerals and get them out of the ground and into the market as quickly as possible, because without those critical minerals, we simply won't have the batteries needed for electric vehicles or other technologies. We need to make sure that we do it in a way that allows Canadians to get the benefit of it.

Some say too many ideas are just flying out of Canada. They are flowing out of the Canadian economy and growing without being of any benefit to Canadians in growing our prosperity.

I see that one of my colleagues wants to.... I feel like I'm hogging the floor here. Watching my son play hockey, I was amazed this year by his U-11 team and how well they shared the puck, so I will practise what I preach now and share the puck a bit with one of the other members.

Who's next on the list, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I had MP Viersen next.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too would like to express concern about the motion we have before us and the lack of clarity around the minister coming to appear before this committee. It would seem to me that the minister would be very interested—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Could I have the floor for a minute?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: My colleague Phil Lawrence would like the floor, so I will share the floor with him.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Perfect. Hopefully Mr. Fast isn't upset.

I see we're coming across two o'clock. We would have to cancel, I believe, the natural resources committee. I'm more than willing to continue to talk, but I would like to impede as little as possible other committees' business, so I move that we suspend right now.

• (1400)

The Chair: We're continuing, MP Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I give the floor back to Mr. Viersen, if that's okay, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's okay.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

I want to thank my colleagues for giving me time to speak at this committee. It's not often that I get to participate at the finance committee, so I would really like to thank them for this opportunity.

As we were saying earlier, I would expect the Minister of Finance to be more than happy to come to this committee and explain the government's budget. This is the finance committee. This is the committee that's responsible for scrutinizing her work and scrutinizing the finance department. I note that we had nearly 50 bureaucrats here today to do just that and explain what the budget was all about, and explain the implementation act that is Bill C-47. We heard about a great many things.

What's interesting is that the bureaucrats are generally empowered to implement the actions of the government, not necessarily to explain why these things have been chosen. Generally, the buck stops with the minister, so it's interesting that the minister is not interested in showing up, or that this motion does not require her to appear for a couple of hours. That seems like it would be the bare minimum of the minister's obligations. I would note that we had several bureaucrats here today who said they were knowledgeable on the technicality of what's being implemented, but as to the logic and the why, that generally falls to the political staff or the politicians, or the finance minister in general.

It's frustrating to hear that we're not able to hear from the finance minister for a couple of hours. I was very interested in—and we had some of the bureaucrats here talking about it—the clean—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, MP Viersen. It is question period.

We're going to suspend at this time. We will take up MP Lawrence's proposal and come back at 3:30. We'll see you after QP.

• (1400)

(Pause)

• (1550)

The Chair: We're back.

MP Lawrence, we're back with you.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Perfect.

Through some negotiations, Mr. Chair, I have put in an offer that I think is pretty fair and reasonable. We'll see where that goes with Mr. Beech, whom I do respect tremendously. He is looking handsome today.

I would like to say something else here. It's for the benefit of the people in the room. I apologize to the hundreds of millions of viewers who are currently tuning in on CPAC to watch this right now. My team was generous enough to go and get "smile cookies". I suggest that everyone go and buy smile cookies. I am giving out these smile cookies and donuts. As I said to Mr. Beech in my difficult negotiation with him, my only condition was that the staff has to eat first. Other than that, we were good.

Solidarity, Daniel Blaikie, if you're online.

That's just a little levity to start. As I said, I'm hoping that Mr. Beech will have some good news for us. Until then, I'm happy to talk about the budget and budget implementation act.

The BIA is a tremendously complicated and large piece of legislation. Of course, we just concluded a meeting today, one of many meetings, where we had no less than 48 government officials. That's 48 experts in various areas. This was with respect to one part of the BIA. It's absolutely incredible and mind-boggling. I believe it's absolutely critical that we have a lengthy discussion.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

The Bloc Québécois spoke very intelligently about the bill, with Mr. Ste-Marie saying that we could easily spend a hundred or so hours discussing it. I think that's a very smart thing to say.

[*English*]

This budget will have long-ranging impacts. Everything from health transfers to the Transportation Act to even the royal family is included in this bill. This omnibus bill requires in-depth consultation.

In particular, it's of critical importance to today's economy. We are at a tipping point here in the Canadian economy. After eight years, we're dealing with a huge deficit and debt, and perhaps a negative GDP per capita number, which is extremely troubling. The deputy leader and Minister of Finance was somewhat disingenuous in the House when she said that we had a 2.5% GDP growth rate in the first quarter of the year. That part is true, but she left out that the vast majority of that growth was in January. March was actually in decline. We are technically in an economy of decline. It's her own budget that forecasts a recession in the latter half of this year.

We need to be signalling to our domestic market and to international markets around the world that Canada is open for business and that we are actively seeking and engaging in capital, not just sweetheart deals for Liberal insiders. We're open to all the entrepreneurs and business owners across our great land who want to make investments, who want to grow their businesses, who want to hire people and who want to increase the prosperity of this great country.

Quite frankly, we are not making that well known domestically or internationally. We should be known as the best place to do business in the world, especially given that we have strong institutions and great people here in our country. However, we continue to create roadblocks in our own way, whether it be through overtaxation, over-regulation or the long arm of government reaching into what

business owners are attempting to do. We need to be clear, and we need to be forthright with Canadians as well.

As I said, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance took umbrage with my comments describing the GST rebate as "cheap marketing". Well, I'm sorry, but that's what the name is. In fact, if she wishes to check Hansard, the officials agreed with me that there was no reason to call this GST rebate a grocery rebate other than for a marketing purpose or for advertising so she could go across the country and say, "Yay. We have this great grocery rebate."

It actually caused some confusion, I might add, in my constituency. I'm sure I'm not the only one who fielded calls about how to use this grocery rebate, how it worked and whether it worked like food stamps in the United States. Not only was it without substance and without reason to call it a grocery rebate and not a GST rebate, but it actually had a negative impact on Canadians, because it confused some Canadians, including people in Northumberland—Peterborough South, the best riding in all the world.

I guess she took umbrage with that. I think clarity in marketing isn't something that should just apply in the private sector; it should apply to the government as well. When the government does something like calling a GST rebate anything but a GST rebate, they in effect create confusion, and it just creates deception in the media. If a private sector actor did that, I would think the government would come after them for being disingenuous and for not being open and transparent.

We've come a long way since this government said they were "open by default". It's been a struggle and a challenge since then. This government said that it was "sunny ways" and that they would be "open by default". Now we've gotten to the point where we're calling GST rebates grocery rebates for no other reason than just to sell the Liberal brand, which, granted, has taken some significant hits over the last eight years. We're facing declining GDP, exploding debt and exploding deficit. We've just gone through that and continue to be ravaged by the impacts of high inflation.

I'm thinking that maybe, once again, I'm holding the puck too long for my colleagues. They might want to discuss this, but I guess I'll just carry on for a little longer here, Mr. Chair, if you don't mind.

Maybe my colleague would like to say something.

• (1600)

The Chair: MP Lawrence, I had MP Fast next, then MP Morantz.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to opine on the merits of budget 2023.

I will start off by saying that I am deeply troubled by this fiscal document. After eight long years of a Liberal government, we have a document that is disingenuous and that, in fact, reflects an untruthful spirit on the side of the government. Canadians, I believe, have the right to ask who they can trust with the finances of their country. At the end of the day, Canada's prosperity hinges on whether budgetary documents actually put in place a fiscal environment within which not only government but Canadians themselves can flourish.

A budget document should outline not only what the government's spending priorities are, but also what the government's growth objectives are and how it intends to actually achieve those economic growth objectives. I'll get to that further down in my comments.

As to the question of who you trust when it comes to budget 2023 and, more broadly speaking, who you trust to manage the finances of our nation, we can begin by going straight to our finance minister and her statements. I am going to quote her statement here at this table. It's been quoted before in the House of Commons. It's probably been quoted here at this table.

Here's what the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, our finance minister, said a year ago when the 2022 budget was tabled. I believe she was already scrambling at that time to try to make sense of Canada's finances. I don't think she actually got a grip on those finances, but she made this bold statement:

...let me be very clear: We are absolutely determined that our debt-to-GDP ratio must continue to decline. Our deficits must continue to be reduced. The pandemic debt we incurred to keep Canadians safe and solvent must—and will—be paid down.

This is our fiscal anchor. This is a line we shall not cross.

That was our finance minister almost exactly a year ago. "This is a line we shall not cross" is something she said. We were going to have a declining debt-to-GDP ratio to ensure that after this massive spending that took place during COVID, our country would finally pivot back to living within its means, to having a defensible, sustainable, fiscal policy going forward.

Then, in the recent fall economic statement, less than six months ago, the minister doubled down. She was still predicting balanced budgets. Now it was going to take five years to get to balanced budgets, but at least she had a commitment, or we thought she had a commitment, to balance budgets at some point in time in the future. Then budget 2023 came around and we dug, dug and dug. We couldn't find this restatement of a commitment to a balanced budget because the reality is there was no such commitment anymore. It's gone, disappeared into the ether.

Of course, what this means is that we will be adding to our national debt, year after year after year, into the future, without any plan of living within our means, the way most Canadian families have to do when they're managing their family finances. A family can't continue to spend, spend, spend on luxury items if they can't pay for those items. They can't keep drawing down on their lines of credit, on their credit cards, without at some point in time finding a way of repaying back those borrowed funds with interest. By the way, interest rates are increasing in Canada.

I get back to the question I asked earlier: Who can you trust? Who should Canadians trust when it comes to managing our country's finances? I think Canadians are slowly but surely concluding it is not the Liberal government.

● (1605)

Let me go back to the notice of motion that we are debating at the table. I am going to quote from it. It asks that the committee continue its pre-study of Bill C-47, which is of course the budget implementation act, by:

(a) Inviting witnesses to appear on the contents of Bill C-47 during meetings scheduled the weeks of May 1, May 8, and May 15 2023, and that;

Members of the committee submit their prioritized witness lists for the study of Bill C-47 to the clerk of the committee by no later than Wednesday, May 3rd, 2023, at 12 p.m., and that these lists be distributed to members of the committee as soon as possible;

(b) Moving to clause-by-clause review of Bill C-47 no later than Thursday, May 25 2023 at 11:00 a.m., provided that the bill is referred to the committee on or before Thursday, May 18, 2023, and that;

i. amendments be submitted to the clerk of the committee in both official languages no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 19, 2023;

ii. the clerk of the committee write immediately to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee and any independent members to inform them of the study of Bill C-47 by the committee and to invite them to prepare and submit any proposed amendments to Bill C-47 which they would suggest that the committee consider during the clause-by-clause study of the Bill....

I'll stop there, Mr. Chair, just to highlight the fact that the amount of time that's been reserved to review and amend this huge bill, which is a culmination somewhere in the order of half a trillion dollars' worth of spending on behalf of this Liberal government over the last eight years.... The amount of time that's been allocated to study this budget is not sufficient. In fact, it's a travesty for Canadians to have to witness their Parliament and their parliamentarians having so few days to review a document that reflects a reckless approach to the fiscal situation of this country, the finances of this country.

The motion goes on to say:

(c) If Bill C-47 is referred to the committee by the House during the subject matter study of the Bill, all witness testimony, evidence and documentation received in public in relation to its subject matter study of Bill C-47 be deemed received by the committee in the context of its legislative study of Bill C-47....

That sounds fairly straightforward. Witnesses will be coming to this committee, and of course the pre-eminent witness we would call to this committee is who? It is the finance minister of our country. We have asked, time and time again, for the minister to free herself up to come to committee to defend her budget, to explain why we have spent so much money as a country and find ourselves in the middle of an incomprehensible inflationary crisis where the cost of living has skyrocketed.

Today we're debating a motion in the House of Commons brought forward by our Conservative MPs in which we lament the fact that, despite having spent close to half a trillion dollars' worth of taxpayers resources—borrowed, I might add—this government has been unable to provide an affordable housing plan. In fact, we're in a situation where Canada's housing prices have virtually doubled over the last eight years. When we look at the price of housing in the markets of Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary and all the communities in between, we see that housing prices have virtually doubled. We've seen rents double.

● (1610)

We have seen deposits or down payments that prospective purchasers have to make increase dramatically. We have seen the payments that mortgage holders or mortgagees have to make go up almost overnight by an incredible amount.

Why? It's because we now have rising interest rates driven by the fact that we have, yes, inflation in our country.

Yes, inflation is in part driven by supply chains that were compromised during the COVID pandemic. Yes, inflation was driven in part by the fact that we had to shut down our economy during the COVID pandemic.

However, one of the major contributors to inflation in our country—and it has been confirmed by economist after economist—was the fact that this government spent so much money during the COVID pandemic. It was far beyond what was required to support Canadians with benefits. This Liberal government spent so much money and pumped so much liquidity into the marketplace that we are now grappling with an inflationary crisis that has become existential for many Canadians.

Many Canadians are on the verge of insolvency, personal bankruptcy or foreclosure, because they cannot afford life in Canada anymore. Exacerbating that problem, of course, is the fact that interest rates have gone up dramatically over the last half year or so.

Why? It's because the Bank of Canada had to intervene in order to fight inflation by raising those interest rates.

The fault lies with this government, which created the problem in the first place and is now asking the Bank of Canada to resolve it by increasing interest rates.

The question goes back to who we trust as a country to manage the country's finances. Is it a government that is directly responsible for creating inflation in our country? Are we going to trust a government like that?

As we entered the budget process, Mr. Chair, you will remember that we, as Conservatives, had three requests. That's all we had.

The first was, Mr. Prime Minister, end the war on work and lower taxes on Canadian workers. They are suffering from inflation. They need a break. That was the first request.

The second was, Mr. Prime Minister, please end your reckless spending and end the endless inflationary deficits that are driving up the cost of everything that Canadians buy, whether it's groceries

or gas at the pump, and whether it's going into the hardware store or, yes, buying a house. Stop these inflationary deficits. That's the number two ask we had.

The third was remove those gatekeepers, those folks in elected and non-elected positions who are increasing the cost of homes and reducing the number of homes that are actually being built. Get the gatekeepers out of the way so that average Canadians can buy a home. Now we have enough homes coming on stream that will mitigate against some of the rising housing prices that we have seen across our country.

Sadly, nine out of 10 Canadians today believe that their dream of home ownership has evaporated. Nine out of 10 Canadians no longer believe in the dream of home ownership. That is appalling, Mr. Chair. I cannot believe that we, as a country, have got to this place in time when our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren no longer have the hope of home ownership.

● (1615)

When I first got into the home ownership market, Mr. Chair, I was a recently graduated law student. I was articling, receiving a pittance in terms of a salary. Do you remember those days?

That was me, slaving away in a law firm, making \$1,500 a month, yet back then, in the middle of the year that I was articling, in July, my wife was out of town and I found a bargain. I bought a home. At that time, interest rates were 18% to 20%.

That should shock you, Mr. Chair, that 18% to 20% was the interest rate at the time I bought my first home. The vendor of the house I purchased was agreeable to taking back a 10% mortgage. I thought I had hit the jackpot. I phoned my wife and I said, "I bought a house with a 10% mortgage; I got a real deal," because I did get a good deal on that house.

I was able to make the mortgage payments on the house, and over the years we were able to pay off that house and buy a new one and upgrade to maybe a slightly larger home, because we quickly had four daughters in succession.

When I got home after buying that house, and my wife got back from a two-week trip abroad, she saw the countertops and they were orange laminate. The carpets were—

● (1620)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): On a point of order, Chair, I have much respect for the member from Abbotsford.

I have three daughters, and I understand now that he has four daughters. Mine weren't born in succession. We had a COVID blessing.

I think it would be really great to get back to the topic of the budget and how great the budget is for Canadians, especially middle-class Canadians and those working very hard to join the middle class.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, that wasn't actually a point of order, but I would just respond by saying that I am actually deeply disappointed that this respected member of our House and of this committee does not want to debate housing affordability in our country. That is what I was addressing. I was sharing my experience of housing affordability as my wife came home and found these orange laminate countertops and three different carpet colours. One—

Mr. Yvan Baker: Chair, I have a point of order. The member is not speaking to the motion.

The member is required, according to the Standing Orders if I am not mistaken, to speak to the topic at hand, which is the motion that's being debated. Anything that's not specific to that topic.... He needs to return to the topic; otherwise, he needs to cede his time.

I am just wondering, Chair, if you could remind him to do that.

As far as wanting to speak about housing affordability, that's actually what we want to do. That's why we want to get this motion passed and move forward with those issues that Canadians really care about.

If we could have a vote on this, that would be great, and we could all move to talking about housing affordability and the other things that are in this budget that are going to help Canadians.

If the member wants to continue to speak, I think he needs to speak to the topic at hand.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Baker.

Yes, MP Fast, please stick to the motion.

Hon. Ed Fast: That's exactly what I was doing, so I'll quote back the relevant portion of the motion: "That the committee continue its pre-study of"—what?—"Bill C-47"—that is the budget implementation act—"...tabled in Parliament on March 28, by", and it goes on to talk about a number of things that would be done.

I'm speaking directly to the budget and to housing affordability, which has become an appalling failure on the part of this Liberal government, so I'm going to continue to talk about housing, Mr. Chair. I note that other members of this committee have also addressed the issue of the budget and have been given much leeway to actually address the broad scope of this fiscally irresponsible and reckless fiscal document.

Mr. Chair, I'll go back. This house that I purchased—with the green carpets, the orange carpets and the crimson carpets that my wife was shocked to see when she came—became our first home, and it was affordable. I was on a very low salary at the time, and even on that salary—my wife wasn't working anymore because we had our first child at home—even on that single salary, I could buy a home with a down payment and afford the mortgage payments when the interest rate was 10% per annum. Today, no matter what the interest rate is, housing is no longer affordable in Canada. It is a major failure on the part of this government.

It's not only housing, Mr. Chair: Taxes are going up on everything, whether it's CPP, EI premiums or payroll taxes, and whether it's excise taxes that go up in this budget and carbon taxes that go up in this budget. This is what the Liberal government is doing to

Canadians. Not only did it create the problem; it's making things worse.

Here's another problem, Mr. Chair. We have stagnating wages. Inflation is eroding what the dollar buys, and wages are not keeping up. Sadly, those with assets are growing richer, and those who rely on a paycheque are getting poorer day by day, because of the eroding value of those paycheques.

Did you know that one in five Canadians today is skipping a meal each day? One in five people across our country, one in five individuals in our neighbourhoods, is skipping a meal every day just to get by, because they can't afford that extra meal.

It's a perverse situation, Mr. Chair, when the working poor and the indigent are approaching food banks and asking for medically assisted death: actual proven cases of people approaching our food banks and saying, "I want to die rather than live in poverty and live hungry." Is that the perverse situation Canada now finds itself in? Is that how we want to live as a country?

Yet there's very little in this budget that addresses that problem. Today, I viewed a video online about a food bank in Toronto called "Fort York", with a line blocks long.... That's going viral now, of course, because it symbolizes what this Liberal government has done to our country.

Now I want to go to the issue of uncontrolled spending, Mr. Chair. I mentioned earlier that uncontrolled spending actually contributes to the inflationary pressures that we face today in our country.

• (1625)

Uncontrolled spending undermines the value of the paycheques that Canadians receive. Uncontrolled spending undermines the work that Canadians do. We're pumping so many dollars—so much liquidity—into the economy that there are way more dollars chasing the same number of goods and services. Any economist will tell you that if we cannot improve our productivity in our country—in other words, what every single Canadian produces—we have some serious problems on our hands. One of those problems is inflation.

The deficit in this budget is \$43 billion. Remember, it was the finance minister who said that they were going to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio and that they were on track for balanced budgets. That was the finance minister, only months ago, in the fall economic update. Today, she's saying, "Sorry, folks," and that she was just kidding.

It's actually gone. The balanced budget commitment is gone. You know that line that she drew in the sand a year ago and said she'd never step across? Well, she just did. Nyah, nyah, that's tough on you.

Mr. Chair, this country has moved from having a \$2-billion surplus under Stephen Harper some eight years ago to having a massive structural deficit. I mean that word "structural", because it implies that these deficits are going to be a way of life for Canadians for the foreseeable future. These are interminable deficits that we are running.

Who pays for that, Mr. Chair? It's future generations of Canadians, so I want to speak to those future generations of Canadians. They are our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren and new immigrants who are looking to Canada as a great country to come to and live in. Their future is a future of debt, deficits and rising interest rates, where they'll be paying back the money we're spending today.

In other words, we're spending our children's and our grandchildren's inheritance as this government blows the wad year after year. In fact, it will shock Canadians to know that over the last eight years, this government has racked up as much debt as every single Canadian government before it—combined.

It should come as a shocking statistic to Canadians to understand that this Liberal government has paid no regard to its obligation to future generations of Canadians, but continues to spend recklessly, knowing full well it will be left to a Conservative government to clean up the mess in the future, as it always is. It's always Conservative governments cleaning up the mess of previous Liberal governments. That's where we find ourselves.

The generational debt that I talk of is of epic proportions. Today, \$81,000 is owed by every single household in this country. It's going up in leaps and bounds as this government continues to spend.

Let me talk a little, Mr. Chair, about the staggering cost of government.

Now, one would have thought that a government that's going to spend so much money at the very least would understand that it's important to exercise restraint in how much it spends on the government itself, and that it would exercise restraint and spend cautiously when it comes to growing the civil service. However, over the last eight years of this Liberal government, the government has added 80,000 new positions, federal government positions, each of which has to be paid with benefits, with pension....

• (1630)

I ask Canadians, has your service level gone up since the government added 80,000 federal government jobs? Are your passports coming quicker, the renewals that you need...? Are your visas coming more quickly? How about your tax refund? Is it coming more quickly?

It goes on and on. The service level we get has decreased, Mr. Chair, yet the cost of government has gone up dramatically. In fact, it's a 30% increase in the cost of government, with a lower level of service and interminable deficits. That is the staggering cost of government today under a Liberal government.

Well, what about our economic performance, Mr. Chair? I had hoped that at the very least there would be a plan in this budget for economic growth. This has been promised every year since Prime Minister Trudeau got elected, and every year economists point out that his budgets do not have a growth component to them.

Canada suffers from a major weakness. It is our Achilles heel, and it is what I mentioned earlier: our productivity, our declining productivity. In other words, it's what Canadians produce. Each Canadian is producing less and less as time goes on, which under-

mines our economic competitiveness vis-à-vis the very competitive countries around the world that want to eat our lunch when it comes to our economy, to manufacturing and to trade. When productivity lags behind, it undermines our long-term prosperity as a country.

Did you know, Mr. Chair, that Canada is at the bottom of the list of OECD countries when it comes to foreign investment or, in other words, attracting investment from abroad? When we attract dollars from abroad, when foreign investors say that Canada is a great place to invest in, that's good for our economy. Now, there are some investments from abroad that we have to review very carefully, of course, to determine whether they are to Canada's net benefit, but overwhelmingly, the money that comes from abroad, from the United States, from the European Union and elsewhere, is used to create jobs in Canada, to grow our prosperity as a country. Sadly, we are falling further and further behind when it comes to foreign direct investment in our economy.

Why is that? One of the reasons is regulatory strangulation. In other words, we have so many laws and so many regulations spread across our country, especially at the federal government level, that businesses are no longer free to thrive in an open marketplace. Bit by bit, we're shutting down the marketplace by imposing level upon level of government regulation, so that many businesses simply give up. They say, "We just can't grow," or they say, "We're going to have to shut down." When we have a government, a Liberal government, that calls those small businesses that are growing our economy—or that are supposed to be growing our economy—tax cheats, that's a great way of incentivizing and encouraging our small businesses to grow—to call them tax cheats, the way this Liberal government has done.

Another area where we're declining is domestic investment. Fewer and fewer Canadian companies and entrepreneurs are willing to reinvest their profits in our economy. Do you know what they're doing? They're looking elsewhere. Colleagues, you know this. Domestic investment is disappearing. It's going to markets around the world that actually appreciate their investment and welcome their investment.

• (1635)

Our taxation in Canada requires, I believe, significant reform. There hasn't been tax reform in our country for many years. We're paying a huge price for that. We need to review how our tax system operates to ensure that Canadian businesses and foreign businesses that want to invest here can do so in a thriving economic environment. Right now, that doesn't exist.

Here's just a note. It's a little factoid, Mr. Chair. Did you know that Canada's per capita GDP.... There are a number of standards and organizations that assess per capita GDP around the world. I've just taken one of them and plucked these figures. The per capita GDP in Canada is \$59,000.

Do you know what it is in the United States? It's \$78,000. That's almost \$20,000 more. Do you know what it is in Australia? It's \$9,000 more than in Canada. We are falling further and further behind when it comes to our economic performance as a country. We're falling further behind in terms of our competitiveness when it comes to attracting investment from other countries. Mr. Chair, we are failing when it comes to economic growth.

I'm going to close my remarks and pass it on to my colleagues here.

I want to say this as well, that there was one last thing that I wanted to see in this budget. I think you can guess what that might have been. Beyond its being just a growth budget—which it isn't—and beyond its being just a low-tax budget—which it isn't—I wanted to see if this budget actually had a substantive amount allocated to address the curse and the threat of foreign interference in our country.

As you know, colleagues, our country faces a very significant threat from hostile actors around the world who want to interfere in our elections, steal our intellectual property, steal our research, and conspire to undermine our long-term prosperity as a country and our long-term national security. It's right for us to ask if there is a sufficient amount in this budget that would address the threat of foreign interference.

This week we learned that one of our colleagues, Mr. Chong, had his family threatened because he voted in favour of human rights in the House of Commons. Mr. Chong is a champion of human rights at home and abroad. Because of his firm stand on human rights, his family elsewhere around the world has been threatened by the Communist regime in Beijing.

It's right for us to ask if there's enough in this budget to address that very specific threat to our democracy. The sad answer is no. There's virtually nothing in this budget to address that threat.

When we raised the issue and asked in the House of Commons, Mr. Chair, that the Speaker allow us an emergency debate on the issue of foreign interference—specifically on the intimidation of Canadian MPs and their families when it comes to standing up for human rights—the response was, I'm sorry, we're not going to grant this emergency debate. It seems that foreign interference isn't important enough.

• (1640)

Mr. Chair, you will sense my profound disappointment in this budget, and you will understand why we, as Conservatives, had no option but to vote against the budget earlier today in the House of Commons. We will do so again at third reading.

Whenever called on to do so, we will vote against this budget, unless there are substantive amendments made that allow us to confirm that the investments that are required to be made in things like addressing foreign interference, are, in fact, made. We don't see that there now. There are many other failings in this budget.

I now yield the floor to my colleague, Mr. Morantz.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Fast.

Go ahead, MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Wow, that's how it's done, Mr. Chair.

To my great colleague here, Mr. Fast, you are going to be a tough act to follow. I agree with everything you said, and I wish I could say it as well. It was so well done. In fact, I'll yield the floor back to you so you can do it all over again.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marty Morantz: Now, I just want to make a few points. I don't think I'll hold the floor too long, because I know that other colleagues are anxious to get at it as well.

The biggest concern that Conservatives have about this motion is not particularly what's in it; it's what's not in it. The glaring omission is that it does not contain an invitation for the Minister of Finance to appear at this committee to defend her own budget. Yielding on that, I will quote somebody who has used this line in the past. This is a line we will not cross.

A voice: Who was that?

Mr. Marty Morantz: When Conservatives say it, we mean it.

Now, all this stuff got me to thinking. I recall an article I read by Philip Cross earlier in April. In this article, he talks about former finance minister Bill Morneau's book, *Where To From Here*. He said that Mr. Morneau “described how the absence of a fiscal target and constant meddling from the Prime Minister's Office 'shattered any pretense of fiscal restraint.'”

It just so happens that I read Mr. Morneau's book when it came out. It reminded me of something I thought was very interesting. There's a passage in this book called *Where To From Here*, where Mr. Morneau describes his experience dealing with the Prime Minister's Office. In one passage, he talks about the CERB. He was asked to go back to his officials, do a calculation and come up with a recommendation as to how much the CERB ought to be. It seems like a reasonable question for a prime minister to ask of his finance minister, to do that analysis.

He talks about his experience. He says:

After looking at all the options and variables, we submitted a range of weekly incomes justified by our carefully considered calculations, only to be overruled by the prime minister and PMO, who rejected our recommendations in favour of distributing \$2,000 per month or \$500 a week because the numbers “sounded good”.

It's hard to believe that's how fiscal policy is done in Canada.

I'm going somewhere with this. Don't worry, Mr. Chair. I know you're very anxious to hear where I'm going with this argument. Trust me, I am. I have a landing spot.

• (1645)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Peter was locked in. I could tell.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Morneau said, “Supporting people off work was critical, but we recognized that the amount decided on by the PMO was over the top.” He called it “over the top”, Mr. Chair.

This is the finance minister:

For many part-time workers or those in low-income jobs, this amount would exceed their regulate take-home pay. I wanted to be generous, but the PMO's figures, chosen with no regard for our detailed calculations and justifications, meant we would be distributing billions of dollars more than was actually needed under the circumstances.

This is the finance minister of Canada saying that. It's stunning, actually. It's absolutely stunning.

Now, he doesn't say what he would have recommended, and I don't know if we'll ever be able to get that information, but I would love to know what he recommended. Whatever it was, this \$1.2-trillion debt the Prime Minister has racked up—well, he's doubled the debt since 2015, as Mr. Fast mentioned—would be significantly lower if the advice of the finance minister had just been followed.

He goes on to talk about the wage subsidy as well. He says:

Once again, my team worked through the night to make our calculations and shape our recommendations on how much money businesses would actually get. I managed to deliver our report to the prime minister at 10 p.m. one evening early in the pandemic.

At a press gathering the next morning, about 12 hours after he had agreed with all aspects of the program I had presented, I watched and listened as he introduced the program to Canada. With great pride he announced the amount of money made available to individual businesses via CEWS...a figure significantly higher than we had agreed was the highest we should go the previous evening!

It's unbelievable. I'm getting to my point about this motion, because I'm not sure, I'm absolutely really doubting, sincerely, Mr. Chair and colleagues on the other side, whether Ms. Freeland, the finance minister, is even the right person to come to defend this budget. It seems to me, if you listen to Mr. Morneau, that it doesn't really matter what the finance minister thinks, says or recommends.

Honestly, I think maybe what we should be doing is changing the motion to call on the Prime Minister to appear to defend this budget. It's clear to me that, by the way this Prime Minister operates, his cabinet ministers really have no real authority.

On that, I want to return briefly to a point I was making earlier about the omnibus nature of the budget.

There are 39 separate legislative initiatives contained in part 4. Earlier today, we had something like 50 officials—50 officials—from the finance department here, and I asked them a very simple question.

Some of you may remember that a few years ago the justice department put a provision into a budget implementation act, saying that the Attorney General should be able to defer prosecutions at her discretion. It breezed through. It became law, and that laid the groundwork for what became known as the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

I asked officials today if there were there any changes. This bill is absolutely massive. Most of the things it contains really have nothing to do with budgeting. It contains things like withdrawing most favoured nation status from Russia and Belarus. That's not a budget item, but it's in there for some reason. It amends the Privileges and Immunities (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) Act to enable the Paris Protocol to be implemented in Canada. That's not a budgetary item in anyone's estimation, but it's in the budget document.

It amends the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Yukon Act, the Marine Liability Act, the Wrecks, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act, and air passenger rights—some of these are laudable goals, Mr. Chair—and prohibits testing of cosmetics on animals, and so many other things.

• (1650)

I was worried, so I asked these 50 officials if there is anything in this bill....

Remember, the amendment for the deferred prosecution agreement was specifically there to benefit the Prime Minister's buddies at SNC-Lavalin, so that they could avoid criminal charges on very serious charges.

I asked them, "Are there any changes in this bill that would benefit one particular company?" Do you know what happened, Mr. Chair? There was no response, not a peep, from any single one of the 50 public servants who were sitting here a couple of hours ago. Silence.... I would still like that question answered before we go any further. I think Canadians need to know if there is anything that is going to be scandal-worthy again in this budget. We need to know it right up front.

With that, I have made my points for now, anyway. I have a lot more to say about this document, particularly around....

I want to say one other thing, because I want to reiterate one point before I finish, which Mr. Fast touched on.

From the day of Confederation in 1867 to 2015, when this Prime Minister took office, the amount of debt accrued by the consecutive governments of Canada was just over \$600 billion. Today it's over \$1.2 trillion. From 1867 to 2015, it was \$600 billion, and from 2015 to 2023.... You be the judge.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have MP Chambers on next.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There is the parliamentary secretary right now, and I'm glad he's here.

Also I want to note for the viewers at home that the member from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is in the building and has a number of materials that he will draw upon for his comments. I am just the warm-up act.

As we talk about the motion before us, we had some requests on this side with respect to clause-by-clause maybe starting on June 6 instead of Thursday, May 25, but we will give all other demands or requests up if we reference an invitation to the minister to appear at the committee for two hours before clause-by-clause.

Based on previous experience, invitations that include the minister don't even need to be abided by the minister, so I'm not really sure what the government's issue is with having an invitation to the minister included in this motion, unless, of course, the minister is intending not to show up.

If the minister does show up, I have some questions for the minister, and this is why it's important.

• (1655)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have just a quick point of order, Mr. Chair.

I think Mr. Chambers point is well taken, certainly by me, if I understand it right. I'd be happy to suggest an amendment to that effect, but I can't do that unless I have the floor.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I will yield the floor to Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Blaikie, go ahead with an amendment to what MP Chambers has suggested.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Chambers, for offering me the floor.

I would propose to amend the motion to add the following clause:

that the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill, and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18

I think that would make the most sense with the motion we have before us.

That is May 18, 2023, of course.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

I am just looking to—

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I'm sorry. As a point of order, could that be read again a little more slowly, so we can make note of it?

The Chair: Okay.

Can you repeat that? Would it be at the end of the motion, MP Blaikie?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Yes, that works for me, if it works for everyone else.

It would be something to the effect that the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill, and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18, 2023.

The Chair: MP Genuis, did you hear that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, maybe just one more time, to make sure I have it, but I think I have it.

The Chair: I have MP Lawrence on this.

Go ahead, MP Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: As always, I am impressed by Mr. Blaikie's ability to bridge the unbridgeable.

I have one small addition to his language, and that would be changing the motion that the clause-by-clause beginning—and I believe the date is the 18th, if I have that right—is made contingent on the minister's appearance for two hours.

The Chair: Okay, so—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm sorry. I'm struggling to find the clause here, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Would you like me to suspend for a couple of minutes?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Yes. Perhaps you could give me just a couple of minutes.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your generosity.

The Chair: Okay.

We're suspended.

• (1655)

(Pause)

• (1715)

The Chair: We're back.

The last speaker on was MP—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Am I on your list?

The Chair: You are on our list, because it is your—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I just wondered if we were going to have some debate on the amendment. I'd be very happy to motivate it. I know that we were in kind of a conversational mode before, but if we are going to be debating it—

The Chair: There is debate on the amendment, yes. Do you want to continue to speak to that, MP Blaikie?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'd love to have an opportunity to motivate it if we are going to be in debate mode, and it seems like that may be the case. One never knows for certain, of course, until proceedings are under way, but it certainly seems that way.

I want to start by saying that I of course agree that the minister should appear on her bill. I'll furthermore agree that she should appear in the context of our inflation study. I've been very consistent about that over...well, over the years now, I think it might be fair to say. It's certainly close to that. It's many months—over a year's worth of months—so that is something that I want to see.

I'm cognizant of parliamentary principles that prohibit committees from compelling ministers to appear, but many ministers do appear without having to be compelled. I think it would make a lot of sense for the minister to appear. There's a fair bit in the bill. Of course, there was a lot in the budget, and there are lots of issues that the committee has been inviting the minister to talk about for some time. I certainly have some sympathy for my Conservative colleagues, who would like to see the minister appear here for more than an hour on the bill, or, if she is going to come for only an hour on the bill, to be clear about her intention to appear for however much time in the context of our inflation study, and to be clear about when she intends to appear.

I think all of that would help the conversation. I thought I spotted a moment, perhaps, where we could get past our current impasse on the present motion, which I also think is a good motion, because I think it helps us prepare our work over the time to come. I've listened now at some length to Conservative colleagues talk about the importance of studying this legislation. It's why I'm keen to get studying it. I've been happy that we've found a way to start a pre-study and to start hearing from officials, because that was a way to get that work started. I really don't want to end up in a situation where we end up using our time to do this kind of thing as opposed to using our time to hear from Canadians on the substance of the budget implementation act, because I think that would be a shame. It's the kind of shame that we have seen around this table before, where we used a lot of our meeting time to discuss the ways we were going to study the budget implementation act without actually studying the budget implementation act.

Of course, as I say, here we are. We have a decent motion for how to proceed that doesn't put an end date on the study of the bill. It doesn't require clause-by-clause to be finished by a certain time. I think we have enough goodwill around the table that, if we could get to a vote, we could include in there an invitation for the minister to appear for two hours.

As I say, there's a long-standing parliamentary principle that doesn't really permit us to compel a minister, as much as we might like to. Of course, if members are interested in changing that principle, allowing committees to compel ministers to appear, I'm open to that discussion, but this isn't the place where that discussion is going to happen. This isn't the place where that decision is going to get made. I'm open to more dialogue about that and to finding the appropriate place to have that conversation. It would probably be the procedure and House affairs committee.

Some members may know that the procedure and House affairs committee is set to meet this evening on the subject of foreign interference, which, as Mr. Fast rightly pointed out, is a very important and topical issue at the moment. I fear that our current conversation now, if we can't at least get to a vote....

I want to be clear that the conversation we're having is one that we're having because of quite a high bar that the Conservatives have set, which is to have consensus in order to be able to make any decisions. I know that when we talk about electoral reform, Conservatives are always very quick to point out that we live in a majority system, and that a simple majority ought to be enough to make decisions in Parliament, and in fact that a plurality should be enough to make decisions in an election. I know they're very familiar with the principle of majority decision-making, but at the finance committee, for some reason, they feel that we need to have a consensus rather than a simple majority.

That requirement that the Conservatives are putting on the committee, which is to have a consensus in order to be able to make a decision, means that tonight another committee is going to get cancelled. It may well be the procedure and House affairs committee meeting that is going to get cancelled. Wouldn't it be a terrible irony if the study of foreign interference that Mr. Fast has said is so important, and the absence of resources that he's decried in the budget, were to be cancelled, and the witnesses who were to appear this

evening didn't get to provide their testimony or had to reschedule their appearances?

● (1720)

Those witnesses include Gerald Chipeur, a partner in Miller Thomson LLP; Ward Elcock, former director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS; and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, former chief of the Asia-Pacific unit, CSIS. Then, from the Vancouver Anti-Corruption Institute, there's Peter German, barrister and solicitor; as an individual, Nancy Bangsboll, independent researcher; Thomas Juneau, associate professor at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa; Christian Leuprecht, professor, Royal Military College of Canada; and, of course, Jenni Byrne, who has an impressive connection to the current leader of the Conservative Party and the Conservative Party generally.

She has said and the Conservatives have said that they're happy to have her appear. Certainly one would hate to think that we're getting filibustered here in order to shut down another committee so that Jenni Byrne doesn't get to say her piece about foreign interference at PROC. I'm sure that's not what's going on, but people speculate around Parliament Hill, and one never knows, of course, what kind of conclusions others will draw.

Here we are. We have Conservatives, who say they believe in majority decision-making, requiring a consensus because they don't like, among other things, that there aren't resources to fight foreign interference. We may well end up cancelling a meeting that's about investigating foreign interference. It just seems like a really basic dysfunction that's happening here, which we could fix by just going to a vote.

If we went to a vote, we could amend this motion to include a two-hour invitation to the minister, accepting the long-standing principle that we can't compel a minister to appear at committee. That's not anyone's fault around this table; that's a long-standing item. Then we could move forward on Thursday with our study of the budget implementation act, which Conservatives have said is going to take a lot of time. In fact, they want more time, not less time.

Also, if we do it soon enough, I think there's a good chance we could allow PROC to do its work examining foreign interference. I just appeal to my colleagues. Let's not get stuck here tonight. I think that's a real possibility, but it's not too late to avert it.

I think we could honour some important Conservative principles, like majority decision-making and investigating foreign interference—which, as it happens, is also an important principle to the New Democrats—and we could be ready to show up to work on Thursday to study the budget implementation act instead of just talking about studying it.

Those sound like three good things to me. I think it's still within our reach to accomplish all three of those things, so I would appeal to my Conservative colleagues, not to agree with something that they don't agree with, but to at least allow a vote to happen so that the committee can make a decision and get on with our work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for allowing me to open debate on my amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

On your friendly amendment, I saw that Mr. Beech raised his hand. Then I have Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: I won't take up too much time, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to take this opportunity to speak in favour of the amendment.

Also, I want to thank all members of the committee for the discussions that have happened over a lengthy period of time. Since we suspended and came back to enjoy spirited discussions on a variety of topics with regard to this motion, of course, the BIA has now been passed and referred to this committee. It is quite timely that we are debating this at the moment.

I'm in a tough position because, as a good-faith negotiator, I don't want to get into the details of the various talks that have been going on for a long time around this, but I think Mr. Blaikie was correct that this feels oddly familiar. If we go back to BIA 2022, we had a similar motion to this, but with an end date on it. It was filibustered by the Conservatives after some negotiation, until it wasn't. Then it was passed, and the only thing we lost was the time for witnesses to come and share their concerns about the BIA.

Like I said, I don't want to get into all the details, but we have followed a very similar path. It is quite interesting, I think, that through conversations with the Bloc and through conversations with the NDP, we were able to determine where the Liberals were, where the Bloc was and where the NDP was fairly consistently and fairly reasonably.

I think I'm on version 11 of the asks from the Conservatives. I've actually gone through multiple negotiators as well. People wonder why we're currently having a Conservative filibuster at committee. Let's be very clear about what this resolution is: This resolution is the consensus that was shared prior to the resolution's being drafted. At some point, everybody agreed to this, and then the goal posts changed.

• (1725)

Now Mr. Blaikie has put forward an amendment that addresses the primary concern, even though I would also note that the prestudy already has an invitation for the minister to appear. On the request of Monsieur Ste-Marie hours ago, we're working on a date between now and May 18. I think it's a fair resolution. It's a great way to study the BIA. It does it in a timely way that reflects what we did last year and the year before, and I am very excited about getting to a vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beech.

I have Mr. Genuis on this.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure for me to be able to join the finance committee. A lot of my service in Parliament has focused on issues of foreign affairs and public accounts, so it's good to be able to visit this committee and to hear Mr. Blaikie share some information with us

about his assessment of Conservative principles. It's always interesting to hear those things.

Chair, there's a consensus among Conservatives that we want to see a robust study of the budget implementation act move forward.

Yes, it happens sometimes, Mr. Beech.

Respectfully, I would say that it's a target-rich environment. There is a lot to talk about in terms of what is in the budget implementation act and some of the concerns it raises.

Sincerely, if the government's wish is for this committee to be able to move forward with meaningful study of that document, of the budget implementation act, the simple thing would be for the witnesses to be scheduled and for the committee not to pass this kind of programming motion.

In my experience, there's absolutely no need for committees to have some predefined programming motion in front of them that says that we will do this in only this way, on this date, with this limitation, and so forth. Most committees undertake studies. They begin studies, and they do so with maybe a general understanding of how they're going to proceed, but with a certain open-handedness to the possibility that there may be reasons to shorten or extend studies based on witness testimony. There may be witnesses who come and raise issues, and those issues may require further discussion or response later on.

I question at the outset the premise of the parliamentary secretary's remarks—and I think Mr. Blaikie said something similar—that we must have a programming motion, that we must pass this motion or something like it in order to be able to study the BIA. I don't think that's true at all.

If this meeting is adjourned without this motion passing—maybe my colleagues can correct me if I'm wrong—my understanding is there is nothing at all to prevent a study from happening. I think that's an important caveat in terms of what's out there.

I have great respect for Mr. Blaikie. He and I have played chess on a number of occasions, and I won't share the win-loss record. That would be unfair. I enjoy chatting with him, etc. To his point, he's put forward an amendment that is fine, but not sufficient. The amendment says that the committee would invite the Minister of Finance to appear before the committee to discuss the budget. In normal times that wouldn't even be necessary. The idea that the finance committee would hear from the finance minister on the budget implementation act... That should be a pretty obvious, automatic thing. He's putting forward this motion saying the committee would invite the minister to appear to speak on the budget.

Well, again, I would have thought that would be a given. It's maybe less of a given, given the evident, ongoing general absence of the finance minister. It's like we need to make the movie "Finding Freeland" to know where she is. She's very rarely in the House and has not been before this committee.

In terms of finding Freeland, the committee should invite her, and she should appear for two hours. Again, this would normally be a given, but it's not, given that the finance minister has not been as visible and as available in terms of answering questions of the committee, which is why this "finding Freeland" conversation is required.

There is an invitation inherent in the motion, aimed ostensibly at finding Freeland, but the reality is that it does not actually necessarily affect that outcome; it doesn't necessarily ensure that's going to happen.

● (1730)

In the interests of ensuring that we are actually finding Freeland, Mr. Chair, I have a subamendment to propose. Actually, there are two component parts to the subamendment. One brings in, I think, another issue.

Before I share the text of that, I will speak a bit to the underlying principle. Obviously, this committee's primary engagement in terms of ministers is with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, who is responsible for putting forward the budget, but it should hear from other ministers, especially in a time when we're seeing budgets that are so expansive and that cover so many different policy areas, as my colleagues have alluded to, with respect to foreign affairs, public safety, national defence, international development and housing. It's any policy area you could imagine that involves expenditure, which is virtually everything. Anything the government does has to involve some kind of expenditure. The budget covers such a breadth of policy areas that I think that not just the Minister of Finance but also other ministers should be heard from as well, as part of these deliberations. I think that's important.

In terms of getting ministers to come before committee, I can share that my experience with other committees is that we've had significant challenges getting ministers before other committees. I'm the vice-chair of the foreign affairs committee. We have tried to have ministers appear more often. We've asked for ministers to appear for two hours. We are hearing from the Minister of Foreign Affairs this week for one hour, which is the first time we will have heard from the minister since last summer. We've asked to hear from the minister on multiple sites.

The context is that I think there's a plan. There's some kind of strategic direction from the government, saying that our ministers are not able to answer questions very effectively from members of the opposition, so we're just going to hold them back and encourage them to not appear before the committee. Hence, we have the whole finding Freeland issue and the need to bring the Minister of Finance here, but there's also the need to bring other ministers to appear before this committee. That is the subamendment.

Also, invitations aren't good enough. Committees can issue invitations. We need to take more seriously the role of parliamentary committees in bringing people before them to hear what they have to say. We have this problem of people just blowing off committees that need to hear from certain witnesses who are doing important work.

As Mr. Blaikie pointed out, we don't have the opportunity to compel ministers to appear before committees. As he pointed out, you could have a debate about the provisions around that, and anybody else could be compelled. Private citizens can be compelled. Political staff.... There are debates around the merits of that. The powers of the committee include the power to compel political staff, deputy ministers and any of these folks. Anyone in Canada can be compelled to appear, except for elected officials.

The irony is that our system is supposed to be built around the idea of ministerial accountability. Ministers are supposed to be accountable. Typically, the back and forth that occurs is when one says that we need to hear from a deputy minister or we want to hear from political staff, then the government says that we can't compel those people to come because it's ministerial accountability. The minister is the one who is supposed to be accountable for the department.

Then the ministers decide not to appear. They have this unique privilege of being able to choose not to appear—just because.

There needs to be some kind of a—

● (1735)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have a quick point of order, if you don't mind, Mr. Chair.

At one point, Mr. Genuis indicated that he was moving a subamendment. I respect that I may have missed it, but I was just wondering if he had moved it already, in which case I missed the substance of his subamendment. If he wouldn't mind sharing it with the committee, I think that would be helpful.

If not, that's fine. I expect that he is coming to it.

I think it would be useful to know whether we're debating a subamendment or the amendment right now.

The Chair: MP Genuis, can you answer that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've gone from "finding Freeland" to "finding the subamendment". I haven't read it out yet, but, in deference to my honourable colleague, who is honouring me with his close attention to my remarks, I will now proceed to read the subamendment, then speak further to it.

The subamendment, as I indicated, seeks to make two substantive changes.

One, I believe the committee should hear from the public safety minister on the issue of the budget implementation act, given the issues we're dealing with around foreign interference and the fact that this budget deals with efforts to combat foreign interference. It creates an office of combatting foreign interference. I would like to hear from the Minister of Public Safety, as well.

Then, I would like to establish that clause-by-clause not begin unless both of these ministers have appeared for two hours.

The subamendment is adding, after the word "Finance", "and Minister of Public Safety". Later on, it reads "that this appearance". That should be changed to "that these appearances"—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, with apologies to my colleague, if this subamendment has already put it in and the process is already complete, that's fine. However, I'm wondering—

The Chair: This is a subamendment to MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Yes, exactly. If we could hold court on that, go back in time and pretend it didn't exist, and if Mr. Beech is okay with suspending the meeting and negotiating off...until Thursday in a good faith way.

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm perfectly fine with continuing forward. I think we need to get to a vote. I'm interested to hear what this subamendment is. Certainly, there are negotiations going on, and I would say this is probably unhelpful.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech.

We're now back to MP Genuis and his subamendment to MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's no problem at all. Mr. Lawrence is doing great work here and on his excellent private member's bill, which we hope will pass into law soon.

The subamendment adds “and Minister of Public Safety” after the word “Finance”, and it changes the term “this appearance” to “these appearances” for grammatical clarity. It adds, before the word “appear”, the word “each”. That's earlier. After “Finance” is “and Minister of Public Safety”, then “be invited to each appear for two hours”. It should say “each appear separately”—because sometimes they'll show up together and that isn't as effective—“for two hours on the bill, and that these appearances”. It continues with the language of the amendment as it was written, then adds the full phrase afterwards, “and that, notwithstanding the proposed date, clause-by-clause not be scheduled unless both of these ministers have each appeared for two hours.”

If the subamendment is accepted, the amendment would read as follows:

“That the Minister of Finance and Minister of Public Safety be invited to each appear separately for two hours on the bill, that these appearances be scheduled on or before May 18, 2023 and that, notwithstanding the proposed date, clause-by-clause not be scheduled unless both of these ministers have each appeared for two hours.”

I have some comments on that subamendment. Before I proceed to those comments, is it understood by all members?

[Translation]

I'm being told that it all works in French too. That's great.

[English]

First of all, let me speak to the issue of why I think it's important that the committee hear from the Minister of Public Safety. As I said, yes, this is a budget implementation act. Yes, it's a budget bill. Yes, it's proposed in the House by the Minister of Finance. However,

it is also the case that the budgetary framework of the government—the budget or budget implementation act we've seen—covers a broad expanse of different issues. I could have proposed any number of ministers, I suppose.

It's interesting to me, in general, in this place how sometimes we give so little time to the most significant issues. So much of the decision-making of the government and the legislative work of the government is packed into one document, which is the budget. There's some expectation that we rush it through quickly, and then committees spend substantially more time doing studies, which lead to recommendations but don't even necessarily lead to legislation.

When the committees are at their peak in terms of exercising real, hard power, I personally think that sometimes we seem to spend less time on that and substantially more time on issues that may be important in terms of the philosophical matter they raise but don't actually involve committees' exercising their hard power.

It is important that this committee, in the process of taking the time it needs for the study, hear from ministers—I think multiple ministers—who can speak to the importance of this.

In terms of the full spectrum of possible commentary that we could hear from ministers, though, let's acknowledge that the particular issues that might be present in the testimony of the Minister of Public Safety are a real priority for the consideration of this committee. This budget and budget implementation act come at a time when I think there's really significant, heightened concern about the issue of foreign-state-backed interference in our country, which is the defining national security challenge of our time.

When I was growing up, I think there was a lot of discussion of terrorism, and it's still very much an issue in terms of national security threats. However, I think we need to adjust our paradigm to recognize that there's this issue of foreign state-backed interference in our country that, in the past, has been under-engaged in by the government. We have tried to sound the alarm on it for a long time. I was the vice-chair, in the last Parliament, of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, and we began a study on the national security implications of Canada's relationship with the People's Republic of China, trying to understand what those dynamics were and what things we could do to respond to them.

• (1745)

The Chair: [Inaudible—Editor] just stick to the amendment and your subamendment.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: A hundred per cent.

The Chair: Well, you're going off topic now—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, I'm not off topic at all, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please just get back to what we're discussing.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm going to stay on topic, as I have been.

My subamendment, just to refresh, is that the public safety minister be invited before the committee. The reason I think we need the public safety minister before the committee is to address the proposals in the budget implementation act that deal with the issue of foreign state-backed interference, which is a defining national security threat.

There's no way one could be more on topic than when speaking about the national security threats we face, the context in which they exist and the proposals in the budget to address them. Maybe just to foreshadow where I'm going, the budget contains provisions around creating an office of.... It's not an office of foreign influence. There are a few other offices that are of foreign influence. It's an office of combatting foreign influence, ostensibly, or an office of responding to foreign influence.

Mr. Chair, the budget has this proposal, and I think it's ill defined. I think it generally misses the point. Obviously, there's a lot of work that needs to be done on foreign interference. There's a lot of expertise out there. So much of the problem has seemed to be political will. The problem has been that we have intelligence agencies, especially CSIS, that are waving the flag. They're saying to the government that we have these big issues. They raised concerns with the government about multiple things that were happening. The government has given very ambiguous, unclear answers about what and when it knew about various issues. Now it says, "Oh, no, we're on top of this, we're creating an office." It's creating a relatively small office that's going to put all the pieces together.

One of the challenges we already have is that when people look at the issue of foreign interference, it's not always clear where they can go for resolution. If you're a Tibetan-Canadian, and you are facing foreign state-backed interference.... I could list various real-world cases where this is happening. The most publicized one was a student leader elected to an office on her university campus, who was subsequently subjected to a series of threats in a way that was likely coordinated from abroad.

If you're a Tibetan-Canadian, if you have concerns and you face this sort of thing, then where do you go? Maybe you go to this office of combatting foreign interference. Maybe that's your call. Do you call that office? Do you contact Global Affairs Canada, the RCMP, your local police or CSIS?

In fact, in many instances, people have been—

The Chair: MP Blaikie, you have your hand up.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is it a point of order?

The Chair: I saw a hand up.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I do have my hand up, Mr. Chair.

It's not a point of order. If you can put me on the list, then I'll be happy to speak when it's my turn.

The Chair: We'll put you on the list, MP Blaikie. Thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

If you're a person who is facing these kinds of issues, if you're a victim of this and you're looking for support, where do you go? Who is responsible for coordinating this response? I don't think that response is going to be coordinated by this small office that, as it

sounds in the budget, is going to exist sort of independently from these other institutions.

There's a lot of information that CSIS already has, but the issue has been political will. The issue has been the government not responding to that information or taking it seriously or maybe making the calculation that it's not in their interest to respond seriously to that. What we have seen in reports in various newspapers is that the Communist Party in Beijing believed that it was in its interest to see the re-election of a minority Liberal government.

That's what has been reported, so it's, I think, this structural challenge that we have, which is that if we are seeing foreign state-backed interference that has as its goal political interference that benefits political actors—and those political actors are the ones who are supposed to be solving the problem and those political actors are not motivated to solve the problem because they are the ones who are in some way benefiting from this interference—then we have a problem. I think the only response to that is some degree of sunlight. When these issues get exposed, the public understandably is concerned about the issue and puts pressure on its leaders to do better.

We have a case right now that has just come out. It's really a baffling and horrifying situation, such that it was the lead item for all three opposition parties in question period—rarely does it happen that there's such a unity of focus and concern on a particular issue—which is to say that we have foreign interference that involved threats against the family of a member of Parliament in response to a vote and work done by that member of Parliament on human rights issues, particularly on the Uyghur genocide. The government, it seems, was aware of that information and did not inform the member involved until it became public.

The government's response since then has been to say it has offered reassurance to the member and so forth, but that engagement should have come much, much earlier. I think any of us would expect that if a foreign government were involved in something that was impacting one of our families, the government would be engaged with us right away.

These are questions that I think we need to put to the Minister of Public Safety. We need to understand what he knew and when. He was asked repeatedly in question period today: When did he get this information, and when was he told what was happening? In fact, at no point did he provide a response. Well, he provided responses, but at no point did he provide an answer to the question in terms of actually saying when he became aware of this information or not. These are the kinds of questions we would likely pose to the public safety minister if he were here.

Related to that, to the BIA, I think it's important to establish what the government is actually planning on doing structurally to combat these problems. On this "we're going to create a new office and we're going to appoint someone new" response, how is that actually going to constructively respond to the problem?

It has been, I think, the pattern of the government in general, as is recommended in the great British television show, *Yes Minister*. When the minister sees a problem and his officials ask him what is he going to do, he says, "I'll appoint someone." He almost has a special rapporteur, but he's not at that point yet.

This is the tendency, but it's not actually resolving—

• (1750)

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Genuis. Could you just move away from the mike and give it some distance? The feedback is affecting the sound for the translators and, of course, it's for the health and safety for our translators, please, if you just keep back a bit from the mike. Thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: If I do it from here, is that being heard on the mike? Is that okay? That's perfect. I can lean further back, even. Is that okay?

This is much more comfortable, Chair.

I've been a parliamentarian—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I don't think anyone is struggling to hear. The struggle is in appreciating what's being said, not in hearing it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Blaikie, I look forward to your subsequent comments on what Conservative principles are, but I welcome your attention.

To be honest, I've been a member of Parliament for eight years, and I've always leaned into the mike, so this is great news.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, what I was—

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

MP Perkins, welcome to the committee.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here.

Sorry to interrupt my colleague, but I just want to make sure I'm following. The clerk has been kind enough to send me the original motion from Mr. Beech, but if Mr. Genuis could circulate his amendment to the members so that we can put it in the context of the whole thing—so, send it to the clerk and perhaps have the clerk send it to us—that would be helpful.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis is welcome to submit it to the clerk, and the clerk can then distribute it to the members.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

What's the appropriate email for that?

Mr. Alexandre (Sacha) Vassiliev (Committee Clerk): It's fina@parl.gc.ca.

• (1755)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just a moment here.

What I sent you is the text of.... I bolded and underlined the additions that I'm proposing and used a strikethrough for the bits that I'm removing. Otherwise, it's the text of the amendment from Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Genuis. It will need to be translated before it can be distributed.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think this demonstration of technological prowess is meant to make the case as to why we need to hire experts to combat foreign interference.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie, we appreciate it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Blaikie, we'll open a chess.com window once somebody else is....

It will no doubt be a great source of disappointment to members when I say that I have to duck out at six o'clock. I will quickly conclude my remarks. I think others may have some points to make, but if the discussion is still going on after seven o'clock, to quote the great General MacArthur, I will be back and I may have more to say at that point.

To conclude, on the issue of the Minister of Public Safety and the importance of his role, as well as the important moment we're going through right now in terms of concern about this issue, I think in the budget implementation act it would have been wiser to allocate funds for a full inquiry into what's going on. That would have been the more appropriate approach. We need to actually look at what has happened, get to the bottom of it and hold people accountable.

I might say that the national inquiry should not be led by someone who works or has worked at the Trudeau Foundation. There are still some Canadians out there who have not worked for the Trudeau Foundation. I'm sure one of them would be available to lead such an inquiry.

Again, this speaks to the importance of having the Minister of Public Safety speak on the budget implementation act and answer some questions about what he's been up to and what the spending plan is around strengthening our police response to these issues. We'll probably have some other questions for the Minister of Public Safety about the challenges this country faces in terms of crime and how the budget seeks to respond to those. The government is devoting enormous resources to targeting law-abiding firearms owners while failing to directly deal with the issue of repeat violent offenders, which can be directly traced to changes the government made to the parole system.

The subamendment that I put forward does deal with the fact that ministers should appear. They shouldn't just be invited to appear; they should be expected to appear. Indeed, the subamendment does say that the clause-by-clause will not proceed unless the ministers appear.

To explain that a bit, there's no way to compel ministers to appear, as has been said and as members know. We can't compel ministers to appear. That's the one exception. You can compel anyone to appear, but you can't compel ministers who, ironically, are the people who should be appearing most often and are most fully accountable for the work being done by their departments. That's the principle of ministerial accountability.

We can't compel ministers to appear, but if we say that the committee expects them to appear before the committee proceeds to clause-by-clause, I think that enshrines the principle that.... I guess you could say it uses the leverage that we have. The committee doesn't have the ability to legally compel ministers to have the Sergeant-at-Arms drag them here. The committee can say that if the government wants to proceed with this legislative agenda, then it has to explain that legislative agenda to committees. It has to make its ministers available for a reasonable period of time—I think two hours is a reasonable period of time to answer questions—and at least respond to questions, if not answer them. If they do so, then the clause-by-clause will proceed.

With great respect for Mr. Blaikie, I think the idea of inviting ministers is fine. Let's invite the ministers, but it would be too easy, if it was simply a matter of an open-ended invitation, for those ministers to blow off the invitation. It will be back to finding Freeland territory again and wondering where the Minister of Finance is and wondering where the Minister of Public Safety is.

In the interest of not being in that territory again and not needing to worry about finding Freeland and so forth, we could proceed with passing the subamendment. Again, to not being in that territory of finding Freeland, I think we should pass the subamendment and therefore be able to move forward.

I will yield the floor at this point and proceed to my other meeting.

As I said, Mr. Chair, I have more things to say. I may have a chance to say them later on this evening.

● (1800)

The Chair: Maybe you will this evening.

I have MP Perkins, then MP Lawrence and then MP Blaikie.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, committee members, for the warm welcome for joining the finance committee for the first time during this Parliament and for the first time as a first-term member of Parliament, who was elected for the fine riding of South Shore—St. Margarets in Nova Scotia in 2021.

You may recall, if you ever visited Nova Scotia, that it includes the beautiful towns of the UNESCO town of Lunenburg, Chester, Mahone Bay, and Peggy's Cove. We can't forget Peggy's Cove, which is the most visited tourism spot in Nova Scotia.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Welcome to the member.

As some advice, we are currently debating a very specific and novel subamendment. If the member opposite would like to speak more generically to the general motion, perhaps we could vote on

the subamendment, vote on the amendment and get back to the main motion. Then we'd love to hear all about his worldly experience back home.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate Mr. Beech's intervention. I would welcome you to the riding anytime, by the way, to visit those places. We'd love to see you.

The Chair: MP Perkins, could we hear from you on the subamendment, please?

Mr. Rick Perkins: On the subamendment to the main motion, which is a question about finding Freeland and whether or not the minister will appear, or the Minister of Public Safety, frankly there are a few other ministers I'd like to see appear on this important omnibus bill.

Remember, omnibus bills were something that were promised would never happen under this government but are not a part of every budget. The effort to get the Minister of Public Safety—

The Chair: On a point of order, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Before Mr. Genuis leaves the room, I want to thank him for demonstrating some of the hazards of subbing in a committee. I hope to be able to say more soon, but I fear that he may be gone. I didn't want him to leave without my having the opportunity to offer that thanks.

The Chair: MP Blaikie, yes, he is exiting the room. He said he will read the blues about what you had to say.

MP Perkins, on the subamendment, please, which is to add the Minister of Public Safety, that's what was being spoken to.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate Mr. Blaikie's intervention, and I must say that I appreciate the work he does in the House. I knew his father. I was a young staffer in the Mulroney government when his father served in Parliament very effectively. He was a large, imposing man in the House, as Mr. Blaikie is as well, and he represents his father well.

On the amendment and the Minister of Public Safety, there are a lot of questions to ask the Minister of Public Safety. He is part of the cabinet that oversees a number of important things, including the expenditure of our police forces and the parliamentary appropriations to the budget for that.

Of course, there are a lot of questions around the issue of the effectiveness of the expenditures from my province to the RCMP in terms of community policing. I think the minister would have some insight, in particular, on the recent Mass Casualty Commission report on the Portapique mass murders in my community in Nova Scotia, where 22 Nova Scotians and an unborn child were murdered, and the fact that it took the RCMP 45 minutes to get to the site after the phone calls that were made within minutes of the first murder being reported.

I would also like to understand why the RCMP took so long to set up a security corridor. It was so long that the mass murderer was actually out of the community before they set that up.

I would also like to know from the Minister of Public Safety how a person with a 72-page rap sheet who was known to the RCMP and to the Halifax police for a variety of crimes—like assault, being convicted of assaulting a 15-year-old and putting him in hospital, and threatening to kill police officers, and who had been reported to have illegal firearms many times and to have committed spousal abuse many times—managed to get a NEXUS card.

As we know—if you have read the report or attended any of the Mass Casualty Commission hearings, as I did—that individual got the NEXUS card from the Canada Border Services Agency, which the Minister of Public Safety is responsible for. This was after he had committed all of these assaults, had all of these complaints, assaulted his father and threatened to kill police officers, yet he still got a NEXUS card.

Why is a NEXUS card important in this discussion? The NEXUS card is important because four of the five firearms that were found in his vehicle after the RCMP located and killed the mass murderer were brought in illegally from the United States. They were bought at gun shows in the United States by an individual friend—not him directly, but he was there—who then resold them to him, and he brought them across the border. He brought them across the border in his truck, with his partner occasionally in the vehicle, using his fast pass NEXUS card to get through the border and not have his truck inspected. He brought these firearms in that way.

I think the Minister of Public Safety has to be available to answer questions around how the agency he's responsible for expends its dollars in this budget in order to ensure that we are kept safe at our borders. It's probable that a fairly fundamental element of the sovereignty of a nation is its ability to police the border. Our inability to police the border is evident with how a NEXUS card was given to the mass murderer.

I think the Minister of Public Safety needs to answer for those questions. In fact, I think he needs to answer for the questions, as my colleague Mr. Genuis said, around the issues of foreign interference, which we heard in the House today, and when they were notified about personal threats against a member of Parliament. That, again, goes to the expenditures of RCMP, Canadian border security, CSIS and our intelligence expenditures, which that minister is responsible for.

● (1805)

I think it's vitally important that he appear and answer those questions.

In fact, some may even remember that, during the public inquiry into the blockade, the trucker convoy, it was discovered, of course, that no police service had actually asked the Minister of Public Safety to invoke the Emergencies Act. He has never answered properly in the House for his claims in the House of Commons that he was recommending that to cabinet because police forces had actually asked for that.

I think there is a lot to account for in the expenditure of the responsibilities of the Minister of Public Safety. I know that it's a difficult situation for him, as it would be for any public safety minister, to actually go the fine line, being careful about what the minister can and cannot say publicly about national security issues. How-

ever, we're asking some fairly simple questions, and he is being briefed by his police services and his security agency services. He's, presumably, publicly representing the advice that he's gotten from them or that he, in some cases, has overturned.

If he's getting advice that says that it's okay to give a NEXUS card to somebody with a 72-page rap sheet, we'd like to know how the Canada Border Services Agency budget is being monitored in terms of its effectiveness, its performance. Did the Canada Border Services Agency executives get bonuses in those years when the mass killer received his pass and then was able to come across the border quite easily, without any inspection whatsoever of the illegal firearms he had? We could also speak to the fact that he was able to obtain a firearm from an individual who passed away, and for whom he was the executor of the estate in New Brunswick. He then took the firearm himself. There's also the question about how the minister reacted or found the advice he got on how to deal with the fact that others, who had licences, had actually purchased the ammunition for this individual.

There is a lot we can still talk about. I represent a fishing riding; I know I mentioned that earlier. I have 7,000 commercial fishermen in my riding. I have a number of other questions for other ministers as well, which I would like to ask. On the issue of ministerial accountability before committees, in my first meeting of Fisheries and Oceans in this Parliament, the minister came to speak—it was her first appearance in the new Parliament—about estimates. We had requested in that committee, and the Liberals had agreed—in fact it was unanimous—that the minister appear for two hours. We had all prepared for a two-hour hearing with the minister. While we were in the committee room, 15 minutes beforehand, the clerk texted all of us and said the minister had decided to cut her appearance to an hour.

A minister is invited as a guest. Obviously, we can't compel the ministers to come, but when a minister agrees to come for two hours, and we plan for two hours, I think it's incumbent upon the minister to stay for the two hours. I think it's disrespectful to Parliament when a minister does not stay for two hours. In fact, I think it's disrespectful for a minister, given that we have a number of parties around the table, to think that one can adequately question the minister on an omnibus bill and all the elements of an omnibus bill in simply one hour. I think the committee is actually being generous by requiring her to be here for only a two-hour session. I think it would be totally within the committee's rights to ask her to appear for much more than that, given the number of programs in this bill.

• (1810)

We've talked about the Minister of Public Safety. Perhaps we could talk about the Minister of Industry. I was the fisheries critic. Regarding the fisheries department, in case you're not aware of the expenditures of the government...We've often talked about the growth of this government. It has grown by almost 80,000 public servants in the time of this government, which is a massive growth.

I'll give you a small example. In my part of the world, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has grown from 10,000 to 15,000 employees in three years. If you were to think those are employees being put out into the field to ensure we have better fisheries science, that we have better fisheries management, that we have better fisheries enforcement, well, you would be mistaken, because the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in that 5,000, hired over 1,200 people at the head office. It hired another 400 people in HR.

You may think 400 people is not a lot for a department of 15,000 people, but that's on top of the more than 400 people the Department of Fisheries and Oceans already had in HR. This department of 15,000 people now apparently needs 832 employees in Ottawa to manage payroll. Yes, it would have been great if they were all in the south shore of Nova Scotia, or other particular parts of the country, but apparently Ottawa was the focus of where they had to be.

Not to be outdone, because of course the people in the finance part of the fisheries department actually control where everyone goes, so the finance department in Fisheries and Oceans is now over 1,000 people of the 15,000 people in the department. Some 200 were hired in the last three years just for corporate strategy.

I know that's being effective—

The Chair: There's a point of order by Mr. Beech.

• (1815)

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm sorry. I just stepped out for a second. Can I assume the subamendment has been resolved, since we're talking about fisheries? I just want to check and make sure we're still dealing with the subamendment.

The Chair: We're still on the subamendment of MP Perkins, and it's about public safety.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You didn't miss the boat. We would have called you in. We would have given Mr. Beech that courtesy. We would have waited, but this is in the context of ministerial accountability. We're discussing—

The Chair: Public safety, yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —public safety and the finding Freeland main motion. If we can find a way to make sure that we're not only finding Freeland, but we're finding the Minister of Public Safety unless, I would venture that...I will probably move a subamendment in a little while to say that the finding Freeland effort should be complemented by the finding Champagne amendment. That would move forward, because the department of industry, as well, has a huge amount in this.

The Chair: We're suspending for 10 minutes.

We have a change over going on here with the interpreters.

• (1815)

(Pause)

• (1825)

The Chair: We're back, everybody.

MP Perkins, you were on, and then I have MP Lawrence, MP Blaikie and then MP Kurek after.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: MP Kurek will take my spot.

The Chair: Okay. After MP Perkins, we'll have MP Kurek and then MP Blaikie.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, part of the accountability of the Minister of Public Safety, obviously, is on the spending in the budget or the plans for our security agencies that he oversees.

It might be of some interest. I was referring to the RCMP and the experience of the inadequate community policing they give, at least in my part of the world in Nova Scotia. Regarding the community where the mass killings were, it took 45 minutes for the RCMP to get there because they're not stationed in that county.

Most of the residents there know that, at certain times of the day and certain days of the week, it's easy to speed because the RCMP aren't there, even though they have a contract with the Nova Scotia government to provide adequate policing services. I know that the RCMP has, since 2004, received about \$1.5 billion in taxpayer money, so I think the Minister of Public Safety needs to be accountable for that fact.

In fact, there is a wide discussion going on in some provinces. Newfoundland has its own police force to deal with community policing. Ontario has its own police force. Quebec has its own police force. Alberta is having discussions about having its own police force.

Recently, a colleague of mine on our side of the House did an OPQ on 911 services and found that, for example, Nova Scotia has the highest vacancy rate of permanent positions for RCMP 911 offices in the country. Thirty-three per cent of the permanent positions of the 911 RCMP facility in Nova Scotia are vacant, which compounds our issues around crime.

In fact, we're dealing right now with the issue of the enforcement of the Fisheries Act around elvers. I've raised it a number of times in the House and a number of times with the Minister of Fisheries. Some of you may have heard me raise it. If you're in a city, you probably don't know what an elver is. It's a little baby eel. They're not as cute as seals, especially baby seals, but they're a lot more valuable. They sell for about \$5,000 a kilogram. For five years, we've been warning the government of increasing poaching. There are only eight commercial licences for those and another three for first nations.

There are two aspects to the enforcement of the law. One is DFO's enforcement, which falls to their police force called Conservation and Protection—C and P as it's more colloquially known—and the RCMP, because the RCMP will back them up when we have disputes like we had with the lobster dispute a few years ago in the previous Parliament around 2020, but we also have the issue of this situation.

I've met with a lot of my constituents. A lot of these licences are in my riding. They phone the RCMP. When they can get through... They phone two lines, actually. They phone the crime line that is listed in the phone book for DFO when they see illegal activity happening, and they phone the RCMP line. In fact, 911 gets called when there are crimes being committed.

Ten minutes from my house.... You may have read a couple of weeks ago that with this illegal elver fishery, an individual was beaten with a pipe. The RCMP got a tip through that line, pursued that individual and arrested them the next morning.

• (1830)

There have been reports to the RCMP of elver poaching in a community called Hubbards—some of you may know it. It's on St. Margarets Bay. In Hubbards, there were calls to the RCMP, constantly, from the neighbours who live by the property, not only about the trespassing happening on their property but also about what was going on, even before the elver season started. Though not quite as cute as baby seals, glass eels are fished only from March 28 to the beginning of June in the rivers of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. They are then sold as live fish that get transported to Asia to be grown to full-size eels, then used for seafood consumption.

We have been constantly complaining to the RCMP over the last five years about this going on. Two minutes from my home on the Ingram River.... The RCMP were called because the poachers park on the private land of this homeowner. They park themselves in the evening, in the dark, on the river, and they catch elvers with illegal nets. Unlicensed elvers at \$5,000 a kilogram are being sold on the black market. The homeowner has called me and the RCMP many times and complained. I have visited her a number of times, both while the legal elver season was on and 17 days ago, on the last two weekends. The minister closed the entire elver fishery 17 days ago. Do you know what happened when the minister closed the legal elver fishery?

A voice: What happened?

Mr. Rick Perkins: All the licence-holders—the legal harvesters—left the rivers. Guess who stayed? All the poachers were given free rein. In fact, they moved into all the prime spots where the legal licence-holders were. I visited those sites in the evenings, on the weekends I've been home, and stood beside these poachers.

This is not the first year. Last year, a number of them were charged with trespassing by the RCMP. Good for the RCMP. When they went to court, the court fined them \$7 for trespassing.

A voice: Are there zeros missing?

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, there are no zeros missing. It's \$7. The maximum fine for trespassing on private property in Nova Scotia

is \$500. When you're fishing a fish and pull 12 to 13 kilograms out a night, at \$5,000 a kilogram, \$7 is just the cost of doing business. It's not much of a deterrent. It's a tip. It's not a very good tip, but \$7 on \$5,000 a kilogram is nonetheless a tip.

The community of Hubbards—where this assault happened and where the RCMP arrested the person—again saw more poachers this past weekend. The homeowner where they were trespassing phoned the RCMP and complained. They said, “Will you please come down here and get these illegal trespassers who are poaching fish illegally off my property?” Do you know what the RCMP call centre, which is understaffed by 30% in Nova Scotia, said? They said, “If you keep calling here, we'll arrest you.”

The RCMP and the call centre are getting so many calls about the illegal elver fishery that they're actually threatening law-abiding citizens with arrest for calling and reporting crimes. Is that ironic? Only under the administration of this Minister of Public Safety, who needs to be questioned in this committee, could the RCMP have the freedom to threaten to arrest people for reporting crimes and not do the job of arresting the people who are actually out on the rivers.

The other aspect of this—which the RCMP and the minister need to be held accountable for, in the expenditure of these budget dollars—is the fact that many of these poachers are coming from the United States, the fine city of Toronto, Quebec and New Brunswick. How do we know that? They are bold. They drive around in their trucks with their licence plates and they're parked right by the rivers. You can see them.

Do you know what else they have when they're in their trucks, on the rivers, illegally? This was reported by the legal licence-holders, but it's also one of the reasons why the Department of Fisheries and Oceans told their enforcement officers not to enforce the law on the rivers: They're carrying firearms. They're carrying long guns.

• (1835)

Four weeks ago in West Nova, my colleague Mr. d'Entremont's riding, in a dispute on a river between two poachers on a favourite spot, one of them shot the other. This is what's going on. Our job as a police force is not to stop violence; our job is just to observe. At least, that's what C and P at DFO has been told.

In the last week of the legal elver fishery, the legal elver fishermen have GPS locators on their nets. For the police forces, it's like finding Freeland: Do you whack a mole here? Do you whack a mole there? We have thousands and thousands of poachers on the river. While the poachers are present, maybe it's easier to find a poacher than it is to find Freeland, but the issue going forward for the RCMP has been how they deal with this. Well, an elver fisher had his legal nets stolen, and he had GPS locators in the net. This legal licence-holder phoned me up and said that he did something he probably shouldn't have done. He looked on his phone, and he tracked the net. He tracked it to a house not far away in Shelburne County, the southern part of my riding where they catch the best lobsters in the world. He drove up to the house in his pickup truck. He parked. He took the law into his own hands because the RCMP are not present, and here's another question to ask the Minister of Public Safety: Why are the RCMP not arresting people for transporting firearms, long guns, probably not legal—but, apparently, legal firearm owners are the government's target, not illegal firearm owners—not for the purpose of going to a shooting range to practise and not for the purpose of hunting but to defend their illegal poaching on the rivers? The RCMP are not stopping them from doing this. The Minister of Public Safety needs to be accountable for the fact as to why the RCMP are not arresting people who are poaching and committing crimes, actually transporting illegal firearms throughout Nova Scotia in order to protect their poaching efforts on the rivers.

If that's not bad enough, this fellow actually went to the house where his nets were, and he saw them. They were in the back of a pickup truck. He parked his pickup truck right behind that one and rolled down his window. The guy came out and said, "What are you doing here?" and he said, "I'd like my nets back." The fellow who had stolen the nets said, "They're not your nets." The fisher said, "I kinda think they are because spray-painted on them is my DFO licence number. So, they're not your nets; they're mine. I can show you my licence if you want." Well, the fellow went into his garage, got a shovel, came out and started beating on the guy's truck. When he was done beating on the truck, he dropped the shovel, and he got in his pickup truck and backed it up and slammed it into the front of my constituent's, the legal elver fisherman's, truck and pushed it out onto the road and drove away. So, like the law-abiding citizen that he is, who obeys even DFO fishing laws, the fisher phoned the RCMP.

The minister needs to hear this, and we've not had a chance to ask him in the House. However, I'd love to ask him before the finance committee why it is that when a citizen reports to the RCMP that he has just had his vehicle smashed by a poacher and that he has the tracking, the RCMP does nothing. Not only did he report that—and, of course, there was the insurance company because of the damage that was done—to the RCMP but he also actually reported it three more times to the RCMP. Do you know what he did three more times? The net was in three more poachers' houses. These guys aren't the brightest people in the world, clearly. So, he reported to the RCMP the location of three more poachers' houses that had the net they illegally stole from him, the legal licence-holder. That was a month ago. The RCMP have never called him back. The RCMP have never gone to the houses of any of these individuals. The RCMP have not made a single arrest.

Crimes are being committed all over Nova Scotia around this, and the RCMP and the C and P branch are not implementing their responsibility, as law enforcement officers, on these complaints. In fact, as I told you, they're threatening to arrest law-abiding citizens who report crimes; it is bizarre to me that they would do that.

• (1840)

The RCMP didn't have an excuse during the public service strike for not going out and doing these arrests, like many of the C and P officers had. Even though C and P is an essential service, half of them were still working and the other half of their enforcement arm was not.

As for the elver fishers in the community, people were sick and tired of people defecating on their lawns, sitting on their lawns all night, having to clean up their trash in the morning and having the threat of having people with firearms outside of their houses while they illegally destroyed a fishery. The RCMP did nothing. C and P also did nothing.

When they would call the DFO enforcement offices, the DFO enforcement officers would say that they're sorry, but they're not leaving the office—the few who were essential services. They said they were only there in case there was a shellfish poisoning and they had to cut that fishery down.

Otherwise, if there's illegal lobster fishing, if there's illegal elver fishing and if people are stealing our natural resources.... DFO and its rules exist so that for generations to come—as we've had for generations in the past—we have a sustainable fishery. Fishery is our most renewable resource next to forestry. Fish grow faster than trees. The reason we still have a fishery is that, for the most part, we've managed it well. Although, the seal population—the pinnipeds, the sea lions....

We have pinnipeds. Does everyone know what a pinniped is? A pinniped is a seal or sea lion. There are six types of seals in Atlantic Canada. There are seals in British Columbia. There are seals in the north. It's been a way for indigenous folks to earn a living and feed their families for millennia. There are sea lions out on the western coast in B.C.

Harp seals, grey seals and bearded seals of Atlantic Canada have grown a massive population. It's the only totally healthy population. In fact, yesterday in the fisheries committee, the DFO scientist in charge at DFO was quite proud of the fact that—I assume she gets bonuses—we have a robust seal population. She said that her goal is not to reduce the seal population.

The seal population in Atlantic Canada eats the entire weight of the commercial fishery in Atlantic Canada every 15 days. Ninety-seven per cent of the unnatural mortality of fish on the Atlantic coast comes from seals, with 3% from commercial fishing.

Yet, this government thought it was a revelation last year for the Minister of Fisheries to stand in Newfoundland and declare that seals eat fish. Apparently that was news to her. Maybe she couldn't see them very much from her riding in Vancouver Quadra. I'm not sure what they were eating. It may have been Alberta beef. Who wouldn't want to eat Alberta beef? It's a food source not readily available in the wild in the ocean. They primarily eat capelin, cod and anything they can get.

In 1991—31 years ago—we had to shut down the cod fishery because of its decline. The same thing happened in Norway and Russia at the same time. Our seal population in Atlantic Canada was 2.7 million. That may seem like a lot, but compared to today, it's sort of like trying to find Freeland. Today, we have eight million harp seals and 600,000 grey seals in Nova Scotia—so much so that they've never had them before in Newfoundland, but now they're invasive species. It's the only predator—the only species in the ocean—that we do not commercially hunt.

There are a hundred first nations in British Columbia asking for a start of the seal harvest again. There are first nations in Nova Scotia.

You can now harvest 100% of a seal. Seals are rich in omega-3. Obviously everybody's familiar with their fur and their leather. Some of the Liberal members from Newfoundland quite often have seal fur gear on, as well as some of the Conservatives.

● (1845)

Our member from Notre Dame in Newfoundland, has seal ties, a variety of them. I have one. I've seen one of the ministers in charge of Newfoundland frequently wearing seal fur products in the House of Commons, which I think is totally appropriate, because generally those seals are caught by first nations.

There are a lot of food sources in seals. When you rise to over 12 million of them in the ocean, you have an issue: We're not enforcing part of our responsibility to maintain the biodiversity of the ocean.

This goes back to the issue of the Minister of Public Safety, because the minister's approach, this one's and the previous one's.... I forget what the previous one's job is now. I know where he sits in the House. He's the former police chief in Toronto—

An hon. member: It's emergency preparedness.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's right. He's the Minister of Emergency Preparedness.

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have a point of order from MP Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, this has been—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Fascinating...?

Mr. Terry Beech: —wonderful.

I miss the fisheries and oceans committee. I was on FOPO for three years. I used to be the parliamentary secretary. It has been very educational.

You may have even convinced me. We won't know until we get to a vote.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I thought we had a vote.

Mr. Terry Beech: Out of mercy and goodwill, I'd be happy to suspend.

The Chair: I think we will suspend at this time.

We'll suspend to our next meeting. Thank you.

[The meeting was suspended at 18:47 p.m., Tuesday, May 2]

[The meeting resumed at 11:03 a.m., Thursday, May 4]

● (5900)

The Chair: We're resuming meeting number 87 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the debate on the motion of PS Beech on the amendment of MP Blaikie and the sub-amendment of MP Genuis in relation to the study of Bill C-47.

Today's meeting is taking place in the hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Of course we have PS Beech here because it's his motion.

We last left off with MP Perkins. Then I have MP Blaikie, then PS Beech and then MP Morantz on my list.

We're going to start with MP Perkins.

● (5905)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The parliamentary secretary is exactly correct. I presume the sub-amendment to have the Minister of Public Safety appear as part of the broader motion of Mr. Beech to have—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: My apologies. I have just a brief point of order.

Chair, would you be able to outline, because we might have some lengthy debate, which I think is important, what you were thinking in terms the schedule today?

The Chair: You know, I think we have resources going right through the full day and right to the end.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I will yield the floor back to my colleague, Mr. Perkins. My apologies.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

The chair was trying to recall what I was discussing in the context of Mr. Genuis's subamendment. I was speaking the other night about the issue of why the Minister of Public Safety, who is responsible for our police forces, security forces and the RCMP in particular, needs to appear to discuss the expenditure of the budget for the RCMP.

In my part of the world, large parts of what they do don't seem to be the enforcement of the law in the context of community policing.

I know Mr. Beech enjoyed his time on the fisheries committee, as do I currently.

I was speaking of the crisis we have in Nova Scotia and southern New Brunswick with the elver fishery and the lack of law enforcement. I'm trying to understand where the RCMP money is going, since it's not going to enforcing the law around this.

If the minister were here, then I would bring some of the things to the minister's attention that were brought to my attention this morning, in fact. The Attorney General of New Brunswick called me this morning. He is Ted Flemming. That's a great, historic, political name in New Brunswick. His father was premier of New Brunswick. He is the Attorney General under Premier Higgs.

He called me about the elver fishery crisis in New Brunswick this morning. It is lawlessness in New Brunswick. Poachers are decimating the rivers. The legal licence-holders of those licences have been taken out of the water by the enforcement arm of DFO. Perhaps the fisheries minister should be accountable for the budget allocations in here as well. That might be another subamendment.

In this case, I explained to Mr. Flemming the history of how the elver fishery had developed in the last 30 years. There are eight legal commercial licence-holders, and an additional three first nations licence-holders. Two of them were granted by the current Minister of Fisheries. Those licences represent 250 to 300 harvesters who are on specific rivers. They are licensed to a specific river.

I'll remind those who maybe didn't have the pleasure of listening to my discussion about elvers the other night that an elver is a baby eel. It's sometimes known as a glass eel. Glass eels, as I said the other night, are not as cute as seals, but they're worth a heck of a lot more money. They're worth about \$5,000 a kilogram and they're easy to catch.

They're born in a place called the Sargasso Sea, which is where four Atlantic currents come together in the North Atlantic. They migrate back to the rivers where their parents were. In the case of Atlantic Canada in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, they start coming at the beginning of March, and they go until July returning

to the rivers. They go to the headwaters and into the lakes, and they become full-blown adult eels over time. When they're older and it's time to reproduce, those eels leave the rivers and go back to the Sargasso Sea.

Why are glass eels so valuable? It's created this lawlessness issue that's going on in Nova Scotia where the RCMP needs to be held to account—or specifically, the Minister for Public Safety needs to be held to account—for the lack of enforcement and the use of taxpayer money in that budget. It's only existed for about 30 years because there has been technology developed to ship them live to Asia as baby eels. Through land-based aquaculture, they're grown into full-sized eels and then sold throughout Asia, particularly Japan, for seafood. It's much easier to ship a 10-centimetre long little baby eel to Asia than it is to try to catch a full-sized eel. It's a lot more cost effective that way.

As a result of the fact that the most prized eels—glass eels, baby eels—are in the Maritimes and a bit in Maine, the price has gone in 10 years from a few hundred dollars to \$5,000 a kilogram.

• (5910)

The licence-holders were reporting to the RCMP as early as March 1 when they arrived that there were poachers on all the rivers. The licence-holders were reporting this to RCMP and to DFO enforcement, but they didn't show up. It was sort of like finding Freeland. We could not find evidence of DFO actually participating and enforcing the law. "Finding fisheries" is a game that's now being played in Nova Scotia and throughout southern New Brunswick on the Bay of Fundy rivers, similar the game we play here in Ottawa called "finding Freeland".

The finding fisheries issue is that from March 1 until March 28, when the legal season opened, fishery officers in enforcement and visibility on those rivers to prevent the poaching were as infrequent as the finding Freeland issue here in Ottawa. Every day, those licence-holders were complaining—as I'm sure the members of the government do, complaining about finding Freeland—that the fishery officers were not showing up to actually enforce the law. Nonetheless, like most fish harvesters, they were busy getting ready for the season. They gave the government the benefit of the doubt that once when the legal season started, somehow DFO and the RCMP would start doing their job.

Well, they didn't. Only 18 days in, because of the amount of poaching that was going on, the minister closed the season—after only 18 days, when it goes to July. She did that on the basis of an estimate of the total allowable catch. Every fish species except for lobster....

Don't get me going on lobster, because we'll be here for days. I can talk about lobster forever.

The elver fishery has this very limited season. After only 18 days it was closed, because the enforcement officers, DFO and the RCMP, apparently were watching. They were observing. They weren't arresting. They were watching and observing the poachers. What they were doing, apparently, was trying to calculate how much the poachers were getting. When they felt that the poachers had caught the total available catch that DFO had licensed to the licensed fishery harvesters, she shut down the season.

In other words, for those listening, those who legally had the total allowable kilograms to catch, which is about 10,000 kilograms, were not allowed to catch it because poachers were on the river, but the minister was actually trying to verify how much the poachers were catching and using their catch as a reason to shut down the fishery.

This is what has led to the frustration. There is one licence-holder in my riding who every day since then has written to the ministers, including public safety. It started with the local RCMP and the local fisheries folks and has escalated, but every day since the closure he has filed a report. I'd like to read some of those emails to these ministers and to the local fisheries enforcement officers.

The individual who is writing these...because obviously we should identify them. It's easier to identify Stanley King, the licence-holder, than it is when we're trying to find Freeland. He wrote on September 17 to the local enforcement officers: Hello, C and P and the RCMP; I'm writing to report continued elver poaching on the East River.

For those of you who don't know, that's off exit 7 of Highway 103 in Lunenburg County, quite close to Chester. Technically it's East Chester, about 12 minutes from my house.

He wrote that illegal fishing has gone unfettered on the East River both nights since the fishery was closed by DFO.

On Saturday night, I actually visited the East River at midnight. I saw this for myself. He wrote that Saturday night, poachers fished from at least 21:28 nautical time—for those of you who don't follow that, it's 11:28 in the night—until 6:17 in the morning.

How do they know that? All the legal licence-holders have cameras on their rivers, and have for years, to provide evidence in case someone decides to destroy their equipment or actually poaches.

- (5915)

He went on to say that they set three fyke nets.

There are two ways to catch elvers. One is called a dip net and the other is called a fyke net. A fyke net gets anchored in the river and the net channels the elvers into this little hole in the middle, which then captures them in the end, because they're swimming upstream. It uses the great mysteries of the currents of rivers and the tides, because they come in on the in tide.

Elver fishing happens in the night, particularly by poachers. Poachers and people who commit crimes like to do things under the cover of darkness. Elvers come in when the tide is coming in and they come up the river. The poachers go out fishing at night and put lights on their heads, because when they stand there with a light, or flash it on the water...

Does anyone here go fly fishing themselves? You know it's illegal to use a light when you fish at night. In most cases you're not allowed to fish at night, because they are attracted to light.

They use light to attract the elvers as they come up the river, and I'll show you some pictures of this, because they're in these emails. They come up and are attracted, and they get channelled into either this net or this net called a dip net. It's just a thing you do by hand. You just stick it in the water and you put it in a five-gallon, pink pail and then you transport it over to a larger lobster crate, which has a bubbler. Then they transport them to Toronto. Generally they're going through the live cargo facility in Toronto, which DFO or the RCMP doesn't seem to spend any time monitoring.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Public Safety why they do not monitor for illegal activity through the live seafood container facility at Pearson airport, and why they continue to ignore that.

He went on in this first email and said that they set at least three fyke nets. He attached pictures to this email. I didn't bring those with me. This is the next night. He said that on Sunday night poachers fished from 22:40 until 4:46 in the morning. They fished on Saturday from 9:30 at night until 6 a.m., and on Sunday night they fished from 11:40, close to midnight, until 4 a.m. I know this, as I said, because they recorded on their motion-detecting cameras.

East River is very important in Chester, as he says.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have just a quick point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think this may be a point of order. It may not be. I'd appreciate your reflections on that when I'm done, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I just want to say that I am actually quite enjoying the opportunity to learn a fair bit about this. If you look at the motion that's before us, you see that one of the components is actually to send a number of aspects of the budget implementation act to other committees, exactly because we want to benefit from the subject matter expertise of those committees.

I think what my Conservative colleague here today is doing—perhaps intentionally, perhaps unintentionally—is making an excellent case for passing this motion, because it would enable us to send parts of the budget implementation act to other committees for study by folks who don't need to be taught this, because it's already part of their work.

He has clearly done a lot of excellent work on the committee for fisheries and oceans, and that's why it's so important that parts of the BIA land at those other committees, so that they can have these discussions by members of all parties, who have an intimate knowledge of the various industries.

I take him, actually, to be arguing for the motion and not against it at the moment. I thank him for the compelling demonstration of why passing this motion is so important. I would remind him, or perhaps inform him—because he is, after all, a substituting member of this committee—that the clock is ticking in terms of being able to get the benefit of that subject matter expertise, because the committee has not yet sent a letter to other committees asking them to study....

Last year we did that, but it came late, so that meant that some committees opted not to engage in that study. I think our own study of the bill was poorer for it. That was something we had hoped to remedy with a timely motion this year, and unfortunately this filibuster is getting in the way of that, even as the member makes an excellent case for why that mechanism is so important and should be incorporated as a regular part of the study of budget implementation acts going forward.

I just think it would be good to provide a little context not just for the committee, but also for the individual member as to what's going on in the context of his remarks. I am keen to ensure that it's not just for fisheries and oceans that the budget implementation act gets such a rigorous subject matter expert treatment, but that in fact it happens for all of the issues in the BIA.

I would encourage the member to try to be succinct in providing the things he thinks we need to know so that we can get to a vote and so that we can ensure that all parts of the BIA are as rigorously studied as some of the tangential elements of the BIA that he is exploring at the moment.

• (5920)

The Chair: MP Blaikie is quite right.

MP Perkins, you may not be aware, but we have a letter prepared and ready to go out to all the committees, like fisheries and oceans, to be able to look at the BIA and see how it impacts them and to be able to possibly look into studying aspects of it. So we've learned about the \$5 for a kilogram of eel here, but that would probably be—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It was \$5,000.

The Chair: It's \$5,000 for a kilogram of eel. My goodness. Okay, so we'll listen.

Some hon. members: You weren't listening.

The Chair: I heard \$5. We will not be seeing eel here for any of our lunches or dinners, because we're very fiscally responsible here at this committee.

But as MP Blaikie said, there is a letter ready to go. It could be sent off to all of the various committees if we can get through this motion, get this passed and get on to the BIA.

Mr. Marty Morantz: On that point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On that point of order, please go ahead MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Chair, with the greatest respect, I think you are in error, as is Mr. Blaikie, in fact. When I examine the main motion, I don't see a referral in the main motion to the committee on fisheries and oceans. I can go through them for you. The

first referral is to the committee on transport, infrastructure and communities.

An hon. member: I think the chair said “like fisheries and oceans”.

Mr. Marty Morantz: The second referral is to human resources, skills and social development and the status of persons with disabilities. The third referral is to the committee on citizenship and immigration. The fourth is the standing committee on health and then there's the standing committee on industry and technology. Then there's the standing committee on defence and then the standing committee on operations and estimates. Then there's natural resources, the standing committee on industry and technology, and the standing committee on environment and sustainable development....

I'm sorry, I think—

The Chair: MP Morantz, you're correct. We have 11 committees.

Mr. Marty Morantz: That's important, because the point was specifically about a referral to the committee on fisheries and oceans. What you said, Mr. Chair, wasn't in here.

The Chair: Yes. MP Morantz, what we're looking at is within the BIA.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I don't think this is a valid point of order.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm happy to continue on with respect to this point of order.

The Chair: Yes, please do.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think Mr. Morantz is doing what I didn't want to do, because I wanted to be polite to his colleague. I think he's pointing out that there's actually not a lot of substantive content with respect to—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Excuse me. On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we—

The Chair: MP Blaikie has the floor.

Go ahead, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: We just want to get this thing going.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm not done. There's actually not a lot of substantive content with respect to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in the BIA, and to the extent that there is—because there are mentions—it's under the Canada Shipping Act, and it has more to do with the problem of abandoned vessels than anything else. So that is being referred to the transport committee.

Now, Mr. Morantz thinks that would be better placed at the committee for fisheries and oceans. Of course, that's an amendment we could consider as a committee. I would invite him to prepare that amendment and to move it. Then I'd be very happy to consider that.

But as I was saying, I was trying to be polite and to recognize that often when members choose to filibuster, they take some liberties in terms of relevance. But if Mr. Morantz wants to call out his colleague for relevance, I'm not going to get in his way. I was just trying to be more polite than that.

The Chair: MP Morantz, do you want to call on relevance? Because there is not much here in terms of what MP Perkins is talking about.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I think it needed to be said, Mr. Chair. You said yourself that there was a referral to the committee on fisheries and oceans. I'm simply recounting the text of the motion, and that referral is absent from the motion. So I'm just—

The Chair: There's not much relevance here—

• (5925)

Mr. Marty Morantz: I was speaking to the point of order itself.

The Chair: And it wasn't that there wasn't any relevance—or very little relevance—to what MP Perkins was talking about with regard to the BIA.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Actually, I find my colleague's statement very relevant to the BIA, and I'd like for him to continue as soon as you rule on this point of order.

The Chair: I do have another hand up.

MP Dzerowicz, on this point of order.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Just on this point of order, I agree with my colleague Mr. Blaikie. Mr. Chair, you rightly pointed out that there is a list of committees in the motion. The reason there's not a fisheries committee being assigned to is because there's no measure relating to fisheries in the bill. That's why there's nothing that mentions that in the motion.

I wanted to mention that and that I agree with Mr. Blaikie. If we can maybe keep the soliloquies and the speeches related to the bill at hand, that would be appreciated.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz. It goes to relevance.

Is this on the same point of order, MP Perkins?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that MP Blaikie was very polite and articulate in his intervention.

I think, Mr. Chair, it is important to remind members—all those who spoke on this point of order—that what we're speaking to is the subamendment to Mr. Blaikie's amendment. The subamendment is where the relevance is, because the subamendment is asking the Minister of Public Safety to come before this committee relative to the budget. Since that is in the budget and the motion, and the Minister of Public Safety is responsible for the RCMP—who are not enforcing the law on the elver fishery—that minister needs to be held accountable, through this budget process, for the expenditures of those monies and for why they're not enforcing the law. That's the relevance to the elver fishery. I know that everyone who is fascinated by the elver fishery, as I am, and concerned about criminal activity would like to hear from the Minister of Public Safety as to why.

What's been interesting is that the Atlantic Canada MPs have been totally silent on the issue of the lawlessness going on—the lack of RCMP and DFO enforcement of the law. Those are part of any budget.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On this point of order, Mr. Chair, could I respond quickly to something Mr. Perkins said?

The Chair: Yes, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: As I said earlier, I certainly appreciate his interventions. I would remind him that the subamendment was moved by Mr. Genuis. At the time, I thought it was kind of interesting. This speaks directly to the question of the relevance of Mr. Perkins' remarks to the subamendment moved by his Conservative colleague Mr. Genuis, when he was touring our committee.

There were two things I thought were interesting about it.

First of all, Mr. Genuis said we needed to hear from the Minister of Public Safety to address the question of an office being established to fight foreign interference, which was announced—he said—because it's in the budget implementation act. What I found interesting about that claim is that it's false, because it's not in the budget implementation act. I suspect Mr. Genuis, who himself noted that his expertise is in foreign affairs, missed this. I think it is common for a lot of people who aren't an integral part of the process on a regular basis to not realize that a lot of what's announced in the budget doesn't appear immediately in the subsequent budget implementation act. Often, people conflate the budget document with the budget implementation act. I think Mr. Genuis did that.

That's an important reminder for all of us parliamentarians, when we substitute on other committees: Be properly briefed instead of walking in and throwing our weight around when we don't really know what we're talking about.

Were there mention of such an office in the budget implementation act, or anything to do with it, then the idea, of course, would be that we would send it to other committees, as we've suggested doing with other content.

I hear what Mr. Perkins is saying. I would remind him that the subamendment was moved—at least by the mover—with the express purpose of getting the Minister of Public Safety here to talk about the issue of a foreign interference office here in Canada. It wouldn't quite be relevant, then, to talk about the fishing issues on the east coast. That's not the purpose for which the minister was being called. Of course, the minister was being called for a purpose that is itself out of order, because the thing Mr. Genuis wanted to talk to him about isn't in the bill we're studying.

There is a bit of a regress going on, in terms of what sounds like a good reason being defeated by another reason that itself turns out not to be good. There is a fair bit of confusion. I hope I've helped resolve some of that confusion. I expect we're going to hear more about Fisheries and Oceans. I always appreciate an opportunity to learn. That's why I sub on other peoples' committees sometimes—to get to learn about other things. It's interesting to be on the finance committee and not get to hear about issues of finance, particularly when we have the budget implementation act before us.

I'm a sport and I'm here to learn, so please carry on. I just thought we should carry on with a proper understanding of what's going on. Now that we have that understanding established, let's continue.

• (5930)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

MP Perkins, I think this is the first time you've sat here on this committee. I'm not sure.

Mr. Rick Perkins: As a member of Parliament it is the first time. As a staff person, I've sat at many finance committee meetings.

The Chair: I believe MP Genuis was also not here. At times, the public or even members and those here on the Hill may not understand that the BIA is not all-encompassing of the whole budget. Where Mr. Genuis was coming from, your linkage to that subamendment and how that may not be relevant are what MP Blaikie is making us all aware of—and those watching today—in terms of what the BIA is.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that intervention.

I'll make another clarification on the point of order, just so you understand. While this may be the second time I've substituted in finance, I have a long history of understanding how the budget works. I worked for the minister of finance in the Mulroney government. I sat in many finance committee hearings over those eight years of the government. I appreciate that, so I know the difference between the bills, the act and the budget statement.

When I look at the subamendment that Mr. Genuis proposed, while there may have been a preamble rationale, when I read the subamendment it makes no mention of the things Mr. Blaikie was talking about. The subamendment just talks about the appearance of the Minister of Public Safety, in addition to the finding Freeland effort that we're going through to get the Minister of Finance to actually show up for two hours on the main motion.

I should remind people that this is what this is all about. It's about the fact that we're trying to get the Minister of Finance to actually show up for a couple of hours, as well as the 11 committees that were referenced earlier by my colleague, Mr. Morantz.

The Chair: Just on that, Mr. Perkins, that was the friendly amendment, I believe by MP Blaikie, to bring in the minister and to add that to this motion. The minister would be added to the motion to come in for an appearance.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I've searched the subamendment and that amendment and I see no reference to any of the things that Mr. Blaikie said, other than the appearance of the Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If I may, Mr. Chair, it's why I thought it was important to say that it's not in the motion, but it was part of the reasons given by Mr. Genuis.

I accept that the intense focus that Mr. Perkins has put on the appearance of the Minister of Public Safety has distracted somewhat from the important point, which is to have the Minister of Finance show up on her own bill. He'll know that I'm in perfect agreement with the Conservatives on this point. I would like to see the minis-

ter here for two hours. I think it would be very helpful for her just to offer to come for two hours. I've been clear about that.

I do think that we got distracted from that appropriate focus of the finance committee by the intense treatment of the importance of the Minister of Public Safety appearing at the committee of finance on a bill that doesn't have any content that the Minister of Public Safety is responsible for.

I can certainly speak to things I think should be in the budget that aren't in the budget. I've talked about employment insurance reform, investment in non-market housing and a whole bunch of other things.

When we're studying the bill, it's important that we know what's in it and which ministers are responsible for it. I do think that's been obscured somewhat by the conversations here today.

The Chair: I have PS Beech on this point of order and then I think it's MP Perkins on this point of order.

Mr. Terry Beech: Yes, and I think this is a fine opportunity to provide some further context for where we're currently at. I was going to wait until the end of this point of order, but since we've gotten onto the topic that I want to talk about anyway, I'll take the opportunity. It also gives me the opportunity to interact with our guest, Mr. Perkins, who has been very articulate on the fisheries and oceans committee, and now I have learned of his previous experience on finance committee, so I'm even happier that he's joining us here today.

For those who are watching at home, and for anyone else who's paying attention, I think we're either nearing or passing hour five of this Conservative filibuster. I would go through all the different requests, the ebb and flow of things that have happened, but the point is that we're in a filibuster that has prevented various witnesses from appearing at committee today for the study of the budget implementation act. Those witnesses include representatives from food banks, the Canadian Health Coalition, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Centre for Future Work and the Smart Prosperity Institute, all important stakeholders that I think everyone around this table respects and thinks could have a very positive voice that could add to the quality of the budget process and the budget implementation act.

It's also preventing, as Mr. Blaikie has articulated and as Mr. Morantz has clarified, a number of letters going out to committees in a timely way. Last year, they didn't have enough time to actually provide valuable feedback. I think there are committees with expertise that do want to weigh in on the BIA, and I think that would also be a valuable process.

The other impact of this filibuster, of course, is the cancelling of other committees due to a lack of committee resources. The day before yesterday, a meeting to study foreign interference was cancelled due to the fact that this filibuster is ongoing and is consuming House resources. There was a meeting of the procedure and House affairs committee that was scheduled but was cancelled due to a lack of resources.

The motion to study this bill is very much in the form it was in last year, excluding some of the more controversial closing dates that were specifically excluded to make it easy for the committee to find a path forward after discussions with all parties. In addition, it has been amended now to include an invitation to the minister to attend. That is, by the way, the second invitation, because the first was included in the prestudy motion, which was outstanding. Then, Mr. Ste-Marie, from the Bloc, asked when that would be fulfilled. While we don't have a specific date, it was targeted for before May 18.

I am thus very happy to continue listening to whatever topics from whichever ministries and whichever substitutes the Conservatives want to bring to this committee. However, if we are serious about studying the BIA and ending this filibuster, there is very much a sense that the will of the majority of this committee, and likely all parties except the Conservatives, is to actually get these excellent witnesses to the table so we can improve this budget, which has measures to make life more affordable for Canadians and to make sure Canada has a dynamic and sustainable economy. We're creating new, clean, sustainable jobs, not to mention measures that will ensure that we have the resources we need for the provinces and territories to deliver quality health care. As long as this filibuster continues, that is what we are putting at risk.

I just wanted that context for this point of order on the subamendment on the Minister of Public Safety's appearing.

• (5935)

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech. I had MP Perkins.

Seeing he's out, MP Lawrence, yes, on that point of order, go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: He's a great colleague.

Here are a couple of ways we could resolve this impasse.

Conservatives want to move forward with the consultation on the BIA. We certainly would like to hear and we certainly do not want to upend any of the other business. In fact, I made several offers to suspend, but the Liberal Party was unwilling. That was mis-characterized, and the public was misled by a statement in the House of Commons that seemed to say that we were intentionally trying to cancel meetings, which everyone at this table knows, quite frankly, is just untrue. It's just a fabrication, and it's sad that it has gotten to this level. Conservatives are ready to move forward. We just believe that, when the government is spending \$490 billion, the minister would like to speak to Canadians for two hours. That's \$8 billion a minute.

It is an embarrassment that she will not come to this committee. She has three times refused invitations. This is the finance committee. As a parliamentarian, I'm nothing special, but I do represent 100,000 people from Northumberland—Peterborough South, and we all represent millions of Canadians. If Minister Freeland wants—

• (5940)

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order on this. I believe he's speaking to the amendment, not the subamendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm speaking to the point of order. It's your point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's on your point of order, which was very broad.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mine was on the subamendment.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yours was on committees.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Exactly. You had a wide breadth, and I'll take the same liberty.

When we look at this, we have a couple of suggestions. One is we remove the clause-by-clause from the date of the start of the clause-by-clause, and then we can move forward in listening to witnesses.

We're ready to go right now. We can get the chair to call the witnesses. All we have to do is remove the clause-by-clause, or we make the clause-by-clause contingent on the minister showing up. Clearly, she doesn't want to show up, and she has a record of ignoring our invitations.

What value does an invitation have if she's ignored it three times already?

We need to make it a condition that we go to clause-by-clause to get the finance minister who, once again, is asking Canadian taxpayers for \$490 billion and won't show up for two hours to talk to Canadians. That is an embarrassment. I'm sorry, but it is.

With that, I will end my point of order and turn my time back to Mr. Perkins.

The Chair: Okay. We were at MP Perkins.

Please, members, speak through the chair.

Was it on the point of order, MP Perkins?

Mr. Rick Perkins: No.

Mr. Terry Beech: I have one last addition on the point of order.

The Chair: Okay. We're still on the point of order.

Go ahead, PS Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: I have two sentences.

This current filibuster is the reason why we need an end date for the study of the BIA.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech.

It's over to MP Perkins, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

I really do appreciate, I think, the heartfelt interventions by all of the permanent members of this committee on this important issue.

I could go on, as you know, about elvers and lobster and all of that. I think that the subamendment has a connection to the Minister of Public Safety.

However, I will conclude the elver part of my discussion about the ministers and move on to a next part. If you will give me a little leeway to read the last email on this, I would appreciate it. Then I would like to discuss a bit about the concept of ministerial accountability, if I could.

In the 17 or 18 days since the closure of the elver fishery, as I said, Stanley King has written to the Minister of Fisheries and to other public security officials as to the enforcement of the law.

I will read you one email from two days ago. He wrote another one today, but I think this one is of particular interest. It fits into the finding fisheries officer question and what's similar to the finding Freeland issue that we're dealing with.

He starts off his email by saying, "Hello, Minister Murray." This was after about 10 direct daily emails to the minister. "I would like to report continued elver poaching on the rivers we monitor in Nova Scotia. The poaching occurred last night on the Hubbards and Ingram Rivers. Please see the attached photographs." I won't share them with you folks. "Apologies for the poor quality, because it was raining." It's not unlike what we have been experiencing here in Ottawa.

"Poaching likely also occurred on additional rivers we monitor, but poachers have recently destroyed some of our cameras on these rivers. But rest assured, we plan to replace them so you can have an accurate idea of how impactful FMO closure has been, as well as your enforcement efforts. This is the sixteenth time I have reported elver poaching from these locations in 17 days, since the fishery was closed. I'm happy to report our security cameras captured a DFO CMP officer finally showing up on the river, something we have been unable to capture in our request for 'finding Freeland'. Unfortunately, it was 2:30 in the afternoon. Why would they be patrolling the rivers during that day for a fishery that happens at night? Maybe we should be looking for "finding Freeland" at night. We're currently looking for her in the day. Surely we see officers at the river during actual fishing hours as well. If not, I can only assume today's patrol was just for appearances, something we're challenged with, with 'finding Freeland'. As you know, East River is home to the longest-running class eel index study in North America."

That's the science that DFO does. "This study has been run yearly for over two decades and is critically important for monitoring the health of our stock and sustainability of our fishery. Licence-holders have pleaded with law enforcement repeatedly to protect this river, to no avail. Please consider enforcing the shutdown. The federal strike is now over, so that excuse is no longer valid. We would like to think CMP would start enforcing the closure as well as the RCMP, but since there was no meaningful enforcement before the strike, we highly doubt that this will be the case." You can sense the frustration. "Without enforcement, the shutdown order has only hurt licensed holders, clearing the rivers for poachers. All the best, Stanley King, Atlantic Elver Fishery."

His exercise of finding fisheries is very similar to the exercise and the purpose of the various motions and subamendments before this committee today on finding Freeland. Really, this is about ministerial accountability. Ministerial accountability is to Parliament.

It's not to the Prime Minister, it's not to the Prime Minister's chief of staff, it's not to their deputy ministers.

I would like to turn to an important article written in the Australian Journal of Public Administration, volume 73, number 4. It's by a fellow named Scott Brenton, the school of social and political sciences, at the University of Melbourne. It's entitled "Ministerial Accountability for Departmental Actions Across the Westminster Parliamentary Democracies".

For those watching, Canada is a Westminster parliamentary democracy.

The summary of the study says:

- (5945)

This study examines the convention of individual ministerial responsibility for departmental actions in the four key Westminster countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The chain of ministerial responsibility traditionally began in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the public sector up to the minister, who is responsible to the parliament, which is responsible to the people. Many New Public Management reforms changed the roles and responsibilities of senior public servants, which arguably weakened the first link in...codes of conduct, guides, manuals, handbooks and legislation, [and] have attempted to codify and clarify politico-bureaucratic relationships.

This is just the summary.

They have generally captured the complexity of executive accountability and better reflect the original convention, while emphasising the preeminent role of the prime minister in upholding individual ministerial responsibility.

That's what we're dealing with here in these motions, whether it's the Minister of Public Safety, the Minister of Finance or, in the case of the two other committees I sit on, the fisheries and oceans committee and the industry committee, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. This is about their accountability, through members of Parliament, to Parliament and their responsibility.

All we're trying to get is adequate time for this massive omnibus bill of the sponsoring minister to hold her accountable, but the finding Freeland effort is made more challenging by the fact that this committee—except for Mr. Blaikie and the other opposition members—and certainly government members seem oblivious to the need to have the minister here for a fulsome appearance to defend this omnibus bill.

I think it's important for those watching to understand the concept of what Dr. Brenton says about our Westminster ministerial accountability. I can see how riveted everyone is with this presentation, so I will begin:

Many Westminster parliamentary democracies rely heavily on conventions or unwritten parts of the constitution, which are based on precedent. Conventions by their very nature are customary, informal, uncodified, and therefore unenforceable by courts of law. While conventions are not explicitly articulated, they govern important political practices such as the activities of the cabinet and prime minister....

They are not even mentioned in most constitutions, certainly not in the United Kingdom.

He goes on:

Yet this remains largely uncontentious, while other conventions have come under closer scrutiny in recent times. For example, a House of Commons Committee reports that: "there is no agreed democratic approach to the division of responsibility between ministers and public servants, and certainly no universal model even among Westminster-style democracies"....

I assume this is a House of Commons committee in Australia, which is where the author is from. It goes on to say, "This paper considers whether the convention of individual ministerial responsibility still exists, in what form, and whether it is an effective accountability mechanism."

We're trying to get at this issue of whether the Minister of Finance, through the finding Freeland effort, is aimed at trying to get a handle on whether this Liberal government believes in ministerial accountability.

This paper goes on to say:

Bovens et al.'s (2008) public accountability assessment tool is used to evaluate whether attempts to clarify or codify politico-bureaucratic relationships have adequately addressed perceived accountability deficits in the four key Westminster countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The following analytical questions will be addressed: why is there an apparent trend towards codification; how did this trend develop and is it likely to continue; does codification mean the principles are no longer mere conventions; and most importantly, has accountability been improved.

We're searching for that here with the finding Freeland effort.

I'm going to struggle over this next one. Maybe it's my glasses.

In one of the canonical texts in the field, *Modern Constitutions*, Wheare defines a convention as "a binding rule, a rule of behaviour accepted as obligatory by those concerned in the working of the Constitution".... Wheare also reconsiders earlier classifications of constitutions in terms of rigidity and flexibility.... While the "procedures" for changing conventions are not rigid like many written constitutions, in practice they are not easy to alter due to the very absence of a tangible and accepted means of immediate change. Rather, they evolve.

• (5950)

Apparently, they're evolving here in this effort to try to find Freeland. This is setting a new Canadian ministerial accountability precedent.

The paper continues:

In a later, yet equally pivotal book *Constitutional Conventions*, Marshall argues that Wheare's "emphasis on obligatory behaviour...may obscure the point that the conventions, as a body of constitutional morality, deal not just with obligations or duties but confer rights, powers, and duties".... It is unclear whether the convention of individual ministerial responsibility imposes obligations in contemporary politics, and if so, whether and which obligations are necessary to ensure accountability.

This goes to the heart of what we're discussing here.

The paper continues:

The doctrine of ministerial responsibility is often interpreted in terms of political responsibilities and parliamentary obligations, rather than in terms of administrative functions....

Bovens et al. (2008) argue that the existing literature on accountability is largely impressionistic based on perceptions of deficits and overloads that are labelled as such without an adequate yardstick. They identify three common normative perspectives—democratic, constitutional and learning—and advocate integration into a multi-criteria assessment tool to determine whether public accountability is working.

That is challenging us here in the finding Freeland effort.

The paper continues:

This study argues that the evidence from the key Westminster countries is mixed; the evolution of the convention, reforms and responses seemingly mirrors the dominance of particular perspectives at particular times, but the pre-eminence of the prime minister in Westminster democracies is not captured by the assessment tool. This confounding variable appears to tie the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms to the "virtue" of the prime minister.

The challenge in this case is that our Prime Minister has been convicted three times of ethics violations. The question of virtue is obviously an issue here in Canada.

The paper continues: "The next section examines the different components of accountability, before briefly summarising the effects of New Public Management (NPM) reforms and accountability. The study focuses on"—we haven't gotten to the details of the study, but it's just setting it up, as all of these wordy academic studies do—"recent attempts to 'codify' (capture in a more formal, written form) conventions and considers the adequacy of these measures."

The first point that the paper looks at is "Conceiving Individual Ministerial Responsibility More as an Accountability 'Virtue' Than Just a Mechanism". On this point, it says, "Accountability is a relationship between an account-holder (or principal) and accountant (agent), where the accountant has an obligation to provide an account to the account holder and is subject to external scrutiny from the account-holder".

In this case, the account holder would be the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the members of Parliament here.

The study goes on to say:

Within the public administration literature there is a tendency to define accountability as answering for one's behaviour and to then complicate this definition (Bovens et al. 2014).

It has other elements to it.

Yet it remains unclear who should be answerable, while also focusing on answerability rather than the behaviour itself. The convention under consideration here though is one of ministerial responsibility and not just accountability.... This Westminster tradition incorporates elements of both by being called to account for one's actions before parliament, while also being responsible for internal aspects of one's actions....

The unwritten doctrine of the responsibility of ministers to parliament was firmly established in the United Kingdom by the nineteenth century. Albeit imperfect, the chain linking the bureaucratic departmental hierarchy to the minister, who is responsible to an elected parliament, remains a chief accountability mechanism.... Bovens et al....disaggregate this accountability mechanism into three stages: the obligation to inform, explain or justify conduct, performance, outcomes or procedures; the opportunity to interrogate or question the account-giver....

● (5955)

That's what these motions are about: our ability to interrogate the finance minister, the public safety minister and perhaps others at this committee and others, in the effort of finding Freeland. It continues, "and the ability to then pass judgement." That, after all, is the purpose of the examination of a bill: for parliamentarians to pass judgment on what a minister is proposing.

The paper states:

This is the dominant conception of accountability, which also permeates the political science literature, and focuses on agents in accountability forums, whether ministers in parliament or before committees, or governments before the electorate.

Obviously, this is the ultimate in ministerial and parliamentary accountability:

A common—yet inaccurate—interpretation of individual ministerial responsibility has been that ministers are expected to resign due to administrative failings....

There are a few in this cabinet who have set themselves up—which I believe as a member of His Majesty's loyal opposition—and are not being held enough to account. The Minister of Public Safety, whom we are trying to get before this committee, strikes me as one of those who has made questionable statements, in my mind, in the House of Commons on many issues—from the Emergencies Act to his most recent ones with regard to the intimidation of a member of Parliament and whether or not this government has done enough to protect the independence of members of Parliament from foreign country influence. To repeat, "ministers are expected to resign due to administrative failings". I think there are a lot of examples with this government. The paper, by the way, doesn't say that latter part. That was my editorializing.

The paper goes on to say, "Yet this has not been the tradition for centuries". It lists a number of sources and then says, "It is now generally accepted that resignation is only likely or expected when it is very serious and direct ministerial involvement can be clearly shown, popularly known as 'the smoking gun'".

Well, we know the Minister of Public Safety and the Prime Minister had security briefs on the interference by China with parliamentarians two years ago and refused to act. In my mind, that—to quote this article—clearly shows, and properly, a "smoking gun". That is enough to say, I would venture, that not only should the Minister of Public Safety resign, because I don't believe he did his job, but also.... The Prime Minister's chief of staff said before a parliamentary committee that he reads everything, especially national security briefs, and must have read that brief two years ago, yet he didn't act. If not protecting the integrity of our Parliament isn't a reason for a prime minister to resign, I don't know what is.

The paper goes on to say, "Ministerial resignation or dismissal by the prime minister is the ultimate and extreme sanction in Westminster systems, but sacrificing a minister has become increasingly

uncommon". I have to tell you, this was written quite a while ago, but it sounds like it was written about the current government. It goes on:

While the ability to impose remedies or sanctions, along with an element of retributive justice, is part of the accountability relationship, resignation is not the only outcome.... Rather, accounting for one's own actions or for that of the department can involve informing, explaining, apologising, remedying the situation, or resigning.

It's pretty hard to get to any of those levels when the finding Freeland effort is on and we've had challenges getting that answered. In fact, in the fisheries committee—I know I digress—we have often asked for the Minister of Fisheries to appear for two hours. On one occasion, she agreed to appear for two hours and 15 minutes but then beforehand decided to change it to an hour. Now, that is her prerogative, but it is disrespectful to Parliament and parliamentarians, in my mind.

I'll go back to the paper:

In order to remedy the situation and to respond to a web of accountabilities, ministers often need to remain in their positions.... Furthermore, the proportion of resignations or calls for resignation for departmental failings is much smaller than for an expanding range of other reasons, which have generally increased over the last few decades....

● (6000)

NPM is an acronym referred to earlier in my presentation of this paper. It continues:

NPM reforms accentuated the roles of principals and agents and therefore it can be tempting to analyse accountability in terms of principal-agent theory. However, in this context the limitations soon become apparent with the assumptions that principals are interested in specific results and agents are opportunistic being too simplistic, and the social and political environments in which these actors behave are understated.... This study aims to contribute to the literature emerging from the alternative social contingency model.

I'm sure we've all read that.

While this model is also based on the idea of rational actors, the key difference is that these actors have an expectation that they may have to justify their judgments, actions and decisions to others, and this logic of appropriateness guides behaviour.... This basis in historical institutionalism helps to explain the political stability surrounding many conventions, as political actors respond to various situations with what they consider to be the most appropriate conduct with regard to their position and responsibilities

One assumes that in other Westminster systems, that means they're actually attending parliamentary committees to be held accountable, as we are searching for in this finding Freeland effort.

The article goes on to say:

Further, much of the existing literature is about public accountability, in that it is "open" and "transparent".... Again while this does capture answerability, the substantive behavioural aspect is often not public nor should be public. For example, public servants should not be publically accountable for the provision of frank and fearless advice to their ministers, but they are still accountable to their ministers. Bovens et al....refer to this "accountability as a virtue", and is inherently contested and domain-specific. It is similar to the commonly used normative term in American academic and political discourse of "being accountable" and relates to the performance of actors and their "sense of responsibility"....

That's very important to ministerial responsibility. Part of a sense of responsibility is a sense to appear before our parliamentary committee, and that's why we are engaged in these motions to find Freeland.

The article goes on to say:

Prior to the ascendancy of NPM, there were slightly different senses of what constituted a breach of the convention. In Australia, the rhetoric was that resignation was required for a major departmental "blunder".... In practice, ministers resigned if they could not support government policy or if they acted unethically....

We've had ministers convicted in this government of breaching conflict of interest and ethics laws. Apparently that's not enough for resignations here, but it is perhaps in Australia.

The article goes on to say:

...but only rarely if they were responsible for a major departmental error, which had to first be uncovered and involve the minister misleading parliament....

We're talking about the Minister of Public Safety appearing before a committee. It's just a thought that comes to mind when I read that sentence.

It then says, "even then they would be advised to 'tough it out'". I'm sure there are a lot of "tough it out" conversations between the current government's ministers and the boys and girls in short pants in the Prime Minister's Office. "Canadian ministers typically resigned due to problems with cabinet solidarity". We saw that with Jody Wilson-Raybould and Jane Philpott. They clearly didn't like being told that they should intervene in a pillar of our democracy, the independence of the judicial system, and they actually had something that many of the Liberal ministers in this government do not have, which is integrity.

It goes on to say, after "due to problems with cabinet solidarity", "and rarely for unethical conduct". It's in this paper—"rarely". Rarely do Canadian ministers, for some reason, resign over unethical conduct. As a new member of Parliament, I find that quite interesting, because in my private sector life, unethical conduct would have put you out the door pretty quickly. It says, "rarely for unethical conduct, personal private misconduct or personal political mismanagement".

• (6005)

The paper then reports:

In only two of the 151 ministerial resignations from 1867—

That's our year of Confederation.

—to 1990 did a minister accept responsibility for departmental maladministration in resigning. In New Zealand, the Cave Creek tragedy of 1995 is commonly cited as a turning point, emphasising the shift from the traditional convention to a post-NPM separation of the minister and the agency. In the United Kingdom, there were three main grounds for possible resignation: inability to support cabinet solidarity;—

We see that, actually, quite often in Britain today.

—personal errors,—

We've seen that as well recently in Britain.

—particularly private indiscretions but also where the minister acted without the support of their department; and policy errors where the minister misled or misinformed the parliament....

Wow. That's still a concept in Great Britain. Isn't that interesting. I'm editorializing again. I apologize to committee members. I'll just note that again. One of the reasons that ministers resign in the United Kingdom, which is often referred to as the mother of all Parliaments because that's where the first Parliament started in a farmer's field.... That's why the colour of the House of Commons is green. They set the trends and the rules for all parliamentary systems, the Westminster systems, which Canada has.

I'll read that last bit again: "policy errors where the minister misled or misinformed the parliament". Maybe that should be brought up more directly in Parliament. Perhaps it should be mandatory reading for new ministers when they are sworn in to the Privy Council here in Canada.

The next section of this important paper is titled "NPM: Clarifying or Complicating the Convention?" It says:

While NPM directly recast the roles and responsibilities of senior public servants, ministerial responsibility has also been affected. Four broad reforms have characterised NPM: marketisation; managerial autonomy to increase responsiveness to clients and communities; a results-focus and performance measures; and a disaggregation of multipurpose departments into smaller, more focused agencies.... Rhodes et al....argue that NPM increased the delegation of direct accountability to senior executives, with ministers transferring responsibility and expecting problems to be fixed regardless of whether the cause is a problem of policy or maladministration.

The original New Zealand "model" of the late 1980s was based on principal-agent theory, and included performance contracts between ministers and agency heads to clarify the formal-legal separation of responsibilities and to detail objectives....

That's quite an interesting concept, actually.

Ministers were "principals" while executive agencies and non-government or private service providers delivered and implemented policy. Ministers purchased particular "outputs"...from agencies in order to achieve chosen outcomes. The agencies were then fully responsible for specified outputs....

Outputs are a thing. Outputs are something that this government seems to not understand. It understands a lot of inputs. This budget and the budget framework have \$3.1 trillion in spending in the next five years. This government seems to measure success by spending record amounts of money, not by what that money actually produces in results. However, I digress.

Ministers purchased particular "outputs"...from agencies in order to achieve chosen outcomes. The agencies were then fully responsible for specified outputs and thus the chief executive could be held accountable, while the minister retained the more complicated accountability for social impact or outcomes....

Similarly, the 'Next Steps' programme in the United Kingdom during the same period—

Remember, that was the 1980s.

—saw the proliferation of specialised executive agencies with delegated government functions. Hood and Lodge...describe the creation of executive agencies as a "special type of public service bargain", with agency heads receiving managerial pay, perks and some autonomy in exchange for relinquishing anonymity and permanence.

• (6010)

As an aside, understand that this budget implementation act creates new agencies, particularly in the area of industry and the area of global investment funding. They have these grand titles. There's \$15 billion, I think, in that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I think we've heard some robust conversation. I'm wondering at this point if we have agreement to move to a vote on the subamendment.

The Chair: Do we have everybody?

Do a count. Make sure that all members are present.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Alexandre Roger): Mr. Chair, Ms. Dzerowicz's camera is closed.

We're ready to go.

The Chair: Okay.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: It is defeated.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I would like to bring a subamendment at this time. I would like to amend—

The Chair: Hang on, MP Lawrence.

We are now on MP Blaikie's amendment to the motion. That's what we are on right now.

• (6015)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I would like to make a subamendment to that, if that is in order.

The Chair: Okay. It's a subamendment to MP Blaikie's amendment to the motion.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: My subamendment would be that section (b) be amended to add "(iii) The Minister appear before the committee for two hours".

In other words, to explain what we are attempting to accomplish, prior to a condition of heading to clause-by-clause, we'll have the minister appear for no less than two hours.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of information, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: MP Dzerowicz, on that, it is actually....

What you're proposing is what MP Blaikie has proposed.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: No. The difference here is that with this amendment, we are making heading to clause-by-clause contingent upon the fact that the minister appears for two hours, as opposed to having an invitation just for two hours.

Mr. Chair, as we've seen, we've had three different invitations that have gone unrequited. We would like some encouragement to have the minister here, as the minister has only spoken 24 times, despite the fact that she has a budget. I have to think that's a record low in the House of Commons. She has only been in the House five times to speak. She has rejected us three times. While we have tremendous respect for the deputy leader and Minister of Finance, her attendance has been less than desirable. This is meant to encourage and incentivize her to come.

Obviously we cannot compel a minister. We can certainly make it a condition and precedent to head to clause-by-clause for her to appear. As I said, we do not mean this in any form to be disrespectful of the deputy leader and Minister of Finance. We believe that it's absolutely critical, given that she is requiring taxpayers to pony up \$490 billion, of which \$60 billion is new money.... According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, \$12 billion is unaccounted for. That means there's no detail or transparency. It includes a \$798-million slush fund that has no accountability or transparency.

We very much want her to appear for two hours. Unfortunately, because she's been unwilling to accept our invitations in the past, we are left in no place but to be skeptical of her appearance. We don't believe we should enter into the clause-by-clause and basically pass this through the committee without hearing from the Minister of Finance. In fact, I believe that would be unheard of and, actually, precedent setting.

I understand that the NDP members feel the same way we do. We would very much appreciate their support to have the minister. It seems like it would make sense for all parties, in government and opposition. I'm sure even government backbench members would like to hear what the minister has to say, because she's been so very quiet. As I said, she's only been in the House five times this year and has rejected three separate invitations to appear in front of the finance committee.

Once again, it's \$490 billion that she and her ministry are asking for for the government. We realize that some of that is very necessary spending and important to the Canadian public. However, there is \$60 billion in new spending. I'm sure there's some important spending in there as well.

This will give her the opportunity to explain to Canadians why they've had to deal with 20-year highs in inflation, why they're still dealing with high rates of interest and why, in March, economic growth turned negative. We will, of course, treat her with the respect that her office entitles her to.

Our whole job and responsibility here is to be the voice of the Canadian people—the common people—who are so extraordinary in everything they do. We believe that the minister has a responsibility to the Canadian public, if she's going to ask the Canadian public for \$490 billion, to appear for two hours before the finance committee. That equates to her asking for \$8 billion for every minute she speaks. I don't think this is an outrageous request.

As I said, we would very much like the NDP members, if they are serious about having the minister here.... The reality is that she's ignored three requests. Just putting an invitation out has got us nowhere at this finance committee in terms of getting there. If the NDP members are serious about having her appear, I'm sure they will support this.

● (6020)

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is it a point of order on what MP Lawrence—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, it's on MP Lawrence's....

I have a question. I heard him read the subamendment. I'm wondering if he can put it in the context of this part of the amendment, in full.

I think you said (b), if I understand you?

The Chair: MP Perkins, I'm glad you brought that up, because what is being proposed is not—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order.

The Chair: You said it was a subamendment to MP Blaikie's amendment, but you didn't add on to MP Blaikie's. You actually eliminated MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That was my point of order. Could he clarify that?

The Chair: He was eliminating MP Blaikie's amendment.

There was another point of order that came up.

MP Dzerowicz, was that you?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I was going to say the same thing.

I think this is a new amendment as opposed to an amendment to Mr. Blaikie's amendment. That's a technical thing, and then I have some comments for Mr. Lawrence. I think we should deal with the technical aspects first. I think it's a new amendment.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order on that.

I think there's some confusion. My point was simply, to start, that you take consideration. Let's have Mr. Lawrence read it in the context of the amendment that he's amending, section (b), so that we all understand that, because it was verbal.

I'm hoping that he can do that for us right now.

The Chair: On that, MP Perkins, it's not section (b)—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order.

The Chair: —because the subamendment was to come at the end of the amendment put forward by MP Blaikie.

You've not added to that amendment, Mr. Lawrence. You've changed it. Is this a subamendment and are you adding to MP Blaikie's amendment?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Maybe, Mr. Chair, I could ask for some clarity. My apologies to the committee for causing any confusion. It certainly was not my intent to do so.

If I am amending the legislation in a different place than the subamendment, that would be out of order. Am I correct in understanding that?

The Chair: The only way for it to be in order would be to propose that we eliminate MP Blaikie's language, his amendment at the end of the motion, and then bring forward what you are looking to do.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On this point of order, Mr. Chair, if I may, my understanding is that if an amendment or a subamendment

would require the deletion of the entire thing it's trying to amend, the appropriate thing to do is proceed to a vote and then have a new amendment presented. I don't think an amendment can completely wipe out the entire content of a motion—in this case an amendment itself—that it's trying to amend.

The Chair: Thank you for that, MP Blaikie, and yes, I just spoke with the clerk, and you are correct on that. It would have to go to a vote.

Members, we'll now go to a vote on MP Blaikie's—

● (6025)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm sorry, but on a point of order, can I continue with my—

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, on the point you just made, we are happy to go to a vote on a motion to invite the minister to appear at the committee for two hours as an amendment, and to then go to a vote on the study to start the study of the BIA so that we can bring in those witnesses ASAP and get to work instead of wasting time.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech and MP Lawrence.

What you are doing in terms of eliminating.... You'd have to eliminate the amendment from MP Blaikie, and that is not possible. We'd first have to go to a vote on MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much for adding a bit of clarity.

I would ask for indulgence to change my subamendment. The subamendment would add on, after—

The Chair: MP Lawrence, you need unanimous consent for that.

Unless members give unanimous consent, would we have to go to a vote, Clerk?

You would need unanimous consent to do what you're trying to do.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Can I withdraw my subamendment and enter a new one?

The Chair: You also need unanimous consent to withdraw.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, I guess the question is whether you've ruled that the subamendment is in order. If the subamendment is out of order and you've ruled it as such, it's not before the committee, so you wouldn't need unanimous consent to withdraw it, because it effectively was never moved because it was never in order to move it. I'm not sure that we would require unanimous consent if the subamendment is out of order, which I believe it is. In that case, whoever had the floor would be free to present a new subamendment.

The Chair: MP Lawrence, it could be ruled out of order, but then we would have to go back again to MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Exactly. I'd like, at that point, the floor, which I have, to move an additional subamendment that will hopefully be found in order.

The Chair: MP Lawrence, this is an additional—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is a different one. That one never existed. It was out of order.

The Chair: We've ruled the other one out of order. This is your subamendment to MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Yes.

I'll read in the subamendment to Mr. Blaikie's.... I'll read in his amendment first, and then I'll put in my subamendment so that we have clarity.

His amendment reads, "(h) That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on or before May 18, 2023." I would add, "and clause-by-clause shall not begin until the Minister of Finance has appeared for no less than two hours."

The Chair: Can you repeat that?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Blaikie's amendment is "That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on or before May 18, 2023." I'll add "and clause-by-clause shall not begin until the Minister of Finance has appeared before the finance committee for no less than two hours."

The Chair: Okay. Members, you've heard the amendment and the subamendment.

Is there any discussion on that?

Mr. Marty Morantz: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: I have MP Morantz and then MP Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I don't know why.... How is it that the Conservatives have a point of order on their own motions? They're speaking to their own motions.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I think you can have a point of order at any time.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'm going to raise a point of order on something procedural.

I don't think it's procedurally in order to revoke something that the committee has already decided.

Can we have the clerk maybe rule that this is not in order?

• (6030)

The Chair: MP Dzerowicz, it was out of order.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Are we no longer talking about the new subamendment that Mr. Lawrence has put on the table?

The Chair: We are at the new subamendment.

The other subamendment was ruled out of order. This is the subamendment to MP Blaikie's amendment, which is (h) at the end of MP Beech's motion.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have another point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hasn't the committee already voted on the requirement to not start clause-by-clause without the minister appearing for two hours as part of the old subamendment? I'm so lost.

The Chair: We did not vote on that. That was just ruled out of order.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If I may, Mr. Chair, I think Ms. Dzerowicz is referring to.... In fact, we are on the third subamendment. We had the first subamendment that we voted on not that long ago. Then we had a second subamendment that was ruled out of order. Now I think we're technically on the third subamendment, if you count the one that was ruled out of order as a subamendment.

I think what she's asking is whether the first subamendment had the question of tying the minister's appearance to the beginning of clause-by-clause. If so, I think the argument she's making is that the question has already been decided by the committee, and the committee can't be asked to decide the same question twice. I think that's her argument.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Yes. Thank you for articulating it better than I have, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Marty Morantz: On that point of order, Mr. Chair, my recollection is that the first—

The Chair: MP Morantz, we're going to suspend for two minutes. We're going to confer with the clerk.

• (1230)

(Pause)

• (1235)

• (6035)

The Chair: MP Dzerowicz, what we voted on was the subamendment to the amendment. We did not vote on the amendment and subamendment as a whole. We voted on the subamendment. That was that the Minister of Public Safety appear and that clause-by-clause not be scheduled unless both of these ministers have appeared.

Hang on one second, MP Dzerowicz.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Pardon me, Mr. Chair. I think the question was for you to rule on the principle of whether the committee—

The Chair: Both of the ministers get rolled in here, so would that not be both ministers?

The Clerk: Yes.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Now we're just changing it to one because we couldn't agree on both.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Are we suspending?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, you have to rule on whether the amendment is in order.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think part of the question that's at stake here is whether the principle of tying the beginning of clause-by-clause...was an important component of the subamendment that the committee has already decided on in its vote on subamendment one.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Do we need another 10-minute break?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I suspect we're going to be here for 10 minutes anyhow, so if we need a break, so be it.

The Chair: My ruling is that it captured, as I see it, the Minister of Finance.

• (6040)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Before you rule, I'd like the opportunity—

The Chair: I have ruled it captured the Minister of Finance, so we would go to a vote on MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I would like the opportunity to discuss it.

The Chair: That was my ruling, MP Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: You're not giving an opportunity to—

The Chair: No. That is my ruling. I have conferred with the clerk and others, and that is my ruling.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I challenge the chair.

The Chair: Okay, there's a challenge of the chair.

An hon. member: A recorded vote, please.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: Do we go now to the vote on the amendment?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but I'd like to speak to the amendment. We're on Mr. Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have a quick point of order.

I believe now that we've dealt with the question of the sub-amendment debate, we go back to debate on the amendment.

The Chair: Yes, we are back to debating MP Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Incidentally, Mr. Chair, I think that means a fresh speaking list.

The Chair: Okay. Would you like to be on that?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I asked for it before we started that discussion and after the ruling.

The Chair: MP Blaikie had the floor.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm happy to leave that to the discretion of the chair. I was just reminding you that it is a new discussion, so typically it's a new list.

The Chair: Were you starting that discussion, MP Blaikie?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: No. I was just having a point of order.

The Chair: Okay. We have MP Morantz, MP Blaikie and then MP Perkins.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Finding Freeland is what we are talking about, Mr. Chair. Specifically, we're speaking to member Blaikie's amendment that the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on or before May 18, 2023.

Why are we so concerned with having the Minister of Finance here? Well, after how the Prime Minister treated the prior minister of finance, Mr. Morneau, by completely ignoring his recommendations during the pandemic, I'm not so sure. But, here we are.

The thing is, we're trying to find Freeland because she hasn't appeared here at this committee in almost six months. During that time, we've invited her three times. She just has not come here.

On February 2, we invited Minister Freeland in the same meeting as Bank of Canada governor, Tiff Macklem, to discuss inflation. On March 7, the committee invited Freeland to appear to defend her main estimates. On April 20, the committee invited Freeland in relation to the prestudy of the budget bill. We respect that the finance minister is very busy, but she should respect the will of this committee.

I'm not the only one who feels this way, Mr. Chair. In fact, there was a document that was signed by the Prime Minister, dated November 27, 2015 and entitled "Open and Accountable Government". I thought we could take some time to discuss this document because it sets out the Prime Minister's expectations of his ministers. I presume that his expectations of his ministers are the same today as they were on November 27, 2015.

Part III is entitled "Ministerial Relations with Parliament". It reads:

In our system of government, Parliament is both the legislative branch and the pre-eminent institution of democratic accountability. Clear ministerial accountability to Parliament is fundamental to responsible government, and requires that Ministers provide Parliament with the information it needs to fulfill its roles of legislating, approving the appropriation of funds and holding the government to account.

It then goes on to say, "The Prime Minister expects"—he expects—"Ministers to demonstrate respect and support for the parliamentary process."

In particular, it says:

They should place a high priority on ensuring that Parliament and its committees are informed of departmental policy priorities, spending plans and management challenges, including by appearing before parliamentary committees whenever appropriate.

I can think of no more appropriate a time for the finance minister to appear before the finance committee than to discuss her budget. I think this is the time.

It goes on to say:

Ministers are expected to seek the views of parliamentarians and parliamentary committees on future plans and priorities, and to dedicate time to consulting and engaging their colleagues in Parliament in order to earn their support.

Under responsible government, Ministers exercise executive authority on the basis that they have the confidence of Parliament (more specifically, the House of Commons as the confidence chamber), which requires that they, and through them the officials under their management and direction, be accountable to Parliament for their actions.

Parliamentary review of spending is a key element of this accountability. The Constitution Act, 1867 sets out the principles underlying the sovereignty of Parliament in the raising and spending of public money. Revenue can only be raised and moneys spent by the government with the authority of Parliament. Ministers must be prepared to respond to questions on spending for which they are responsible, and to regular parliamentary review of departmental expenditures.

It goes on to talk about “Ministerial House Duties”, noting that “The Prime Minister expects Ministers to place a very high priority on their House duties.”

Now, I noted earlier that the Minister of Finance has only actually been in the House for five days in 2023. That's just 11% of the sitting days this year. She was in the House on January 30, February 13, March 10, April 25 and May 1. That's five days.

• (6045)

That doesn't seem to be the minister placing a very high priority on her House duties.

It gets a little more specific, Mr. Chair. It actually says “Daily attendance at Question Period”. I can't remember the last time I saw the finance minister, except I think a couple of days ago. I went through the dates she was in the House. Five days this year is not daily attendance, and yet this is what the Prime Minister expects of her.

It says:

Any proposed absences must be cleared with the Prime Minister's Office before other commitments are made. When a Minister is absent, a designated Minister or Parliamentary Secretary answers for him or her.

Attendance. Attendance at other specified times is required according to a mandatory schedule of House duties prepared....

I haven't seen that happen either. I have not seen the Minister of Finance in the House on House duty all year.

Ministers are personally responsible for arranging replacements if they have to be absent and for notifying the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Chief Government Whip of the arrangements.

Piloting legislation.

This is key, Mr. Chair, and it actually says:

The Prime Minister expects Ministers to pilot their own legislation through the House and to appear before parliamentary committees of both Houses...

This really gets interesting. Let me read that again. It says, “The Prime Minister expects Ministers to pilot their own legislation”—which this bill is, legislation of the finance minister—“through the House”.

Before we get to the committee part, I want to draw your attention to the fact that just a couple of days ago the government decided to shut down debate, essentially by bringing a time allocation motion to kill debate on this bill, Bill C-47.

Normally the finance minister would be in the House to defend the legislation for the required 30 minutes. That is the customary way we do things. In fact, I've never seen it done any other way in my three and a half years here, Mr. Chair, but again, they couldn't find Freeland. She didn't show up to defend her own legislation, to pilot, as the Prime Minister expects, her own legislation through the House. She wasn't there, and, you know, the associate minister, Mr. Boissonnault, wasn't there. Ironically, we would end up with Minister Wilkinson, the Minister of Natural Resources—who actually has nothing to do with piloting the budget—defending Minister Freeland in the House on her motion to shut down debate.

I'm getting concerned, Mr. Chair, about the well-being of the finance minister. I hope she's okay. I sincerely do, but she is not here. We need to see her presence to know that she is ready, willing and

available to do what the Prime Minister expects of her, which is to pilot her legislation through the House. It says very specifically on page 9, “to appear before parliamentary committees of both Houses”, here and the other place, the Senate, “as required.”

The government will pursue its legislative agenda by requiring that all government Members of Parliament vote with the government on matters of confidence, which include matters of fundamental importance to the government such as the Main and Supplementary Estimates, the Budget, the implementation of electoral commitments, and matters that address shared values and the protections guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights....

“Committee relations” is a very important section. On page 10 of the same document, it says:

Ministers are expected to ensure that policy [initiatives] and legislative issues are brought forward so as to enable meaningful discussion at—

Do you know where, Mr. Chair? This was the Prime Minister talking: “meaningful discussion [of legislative issues] at parliamentary committees.”

Ministers should also place a high priority on developing good relationships with parliamentary committee chairs and members, and supporting the essential work of the committee. This includes appearing before committees whenever appropriate.

I think we have a pretty strong case here that the minister should appear on her own budget. In fact, it's hard to imagine that we really even have to argue for it. I think the sooner she comes to this committee to answer a few questions, the better.

Page 48 of the document says:

Supporting Ministerial Accountability to Parliament

Appearances before House and Senate committees by Ministers and their officials are an essential part—

This isn't me talking. This is from a document posted on the Prime Minister's website.

• (6050)

It states:

Appearances before House and Senate committees by Ministers and their officials are an essential part of informing Parliament, [which enables] parliamentarians to represent the views of their constituents...and to hold the government to account for its management and policies. Ministers should promote an ongoing dialogue with parliamentary committees on their department's policy priorities, legislative and spending issues, and management challenges. Ministers, supported by the public service, should appear regularly before their respective parliamentary committee to seek the committee's input into policy and spending priorities, and to discuss departmental performance and results. Ministers are expected to provide, consistent with Treasury Board guidelines, informative and balanced reports to Parliament, most importantly the Estimates, the Report on Plans and Priorities, and Departmental Performance Reports. Ministers and their officials must cooperate with the committees in their work....

Let me read that last part again: “Ministers and their officials must cooperate with the committees in their work”. I have to reiterate this. We invited the minister here three times this year. On February 2 we invited her to appear with the bank governor. On March 7 we invited her to appear to defend the main estimates. She didn't come on the main estimates. That's hard to believe. The committee invited Minister Freeland in relation to the prestudy of the budget bill.

Here we have a section in the document, tabled by the Prime Minister, that “Ministers and their officials must cooperate with the committees in their work and seek the views”, and that's not happening. We have a dysfunctional situation. That's why we are so adamant that we have a motion passed by this committee that calls on the finance minister to appear before we get into the....

Now, we'd like to see, as Conservatives, that the minister appears before we get to clause-by-clause. It will be easier to consider each clause once we have the input and perspective of the minister herself and once we have the chance to ask her questions directly related to those clauses. We have no guarantee that this will happen.

The principles of ministerial accountability guide ministers and their officials appearing before parliamentary committees, including when officials appear in their capacity as accounting officers. Ministers are responsible for providing answers to Parliament on questions regarding government policies, programs and activities and for providing as much information as possible about the use of their powers, including those delegated to them by others. This is the Prime Minister talking. This isn't me. I'm just reminding the committee of the Prime Minister's views.

Now, I'm assuming that the Prime Minister feels the same way about this as he did in 2015. If he does, he should perhaps speak with the Minister of Finance at the earliest possible time to urge her to get to committee so that we can get on with the consideration of her legislation.

You know, Mr. Chair, another reason she needs to come here is that we have many important questions for her. The fiscal anchor that the Minister of Finance said she was completely committed to just one short year ago is now gone. What are fiscal anchors? Fiscal anchors are essentially a policy position of government that says we're going to do something to make sure that we are fiscally responsible. Some fiscal anchors are when government says we're going to commit to a balanced budget by a certain year. Another fiscal anchor is where a government says we may still run deficits, but we're going to make sure that the total amount of our debt as a percentage of the total value of our economy, the GDP, goes down a little bit every year so that we're not encroaching on the equity of our economy.

That's what Minister Freeland did last year. In fact, I'll quote her:

...let me be very clear: We are absolutely determined that our debt-to-GDP ratio must continue to decline. Our deficits must continue to be reduced. The pandemic debt we incurred to keep Canadians safe and solvent must—and will—be paid down.

This is our fiscal anchor. This is a line we shall not cross.

The sad part of all this is that I don't know how we could trust the Minister of Finance, if she came up with a new fiscal anchor

this year, that she wouldn't just ignore it when it was convenient again, and next year.

• (6055)

We have a real credibility gap here, and that's another reason why she needs to come and explain why the debt-to-GDP ratio is going up just a year later when in fact she promised. In fact, it was not just a promise, it was a declaration of “a line we shall not cross”. She needs to come here and explain why she did that. Those were bold words. She proclaimed to the world that our debt-to-GDP ratio was her fiscal anchor, that she could and should be trusted to bring Canada's finances under control. She said that and it's not happening.

Another thing she said, not even a year ago, in the fall economic statement, was that by 2027, the budget wouldn't be balanced but would have a surplus of \$4.5 billion. That's music to Conservative ears. I thought, that's okay, maybe they're actually serious now about bringing the budget to balance, being fiscally responsible, doing the right thing. But that was November. That was ancient history, according to this government. Six months is a lifetime.

I'm flipping through the budget document. By the way, so people watching can understand what we're talking about, I brought a copy of the budget bill here with me. This is it, for all the students here today. It's over 400 pages, and you know what? The Finance Minister who wrote this law won't come here to answer questions about what it's all about. That's not right. Do you folks think that's right? Anyone put up their hand if they think that's right. I don't see any hands going up from our wonderful students at the back of the room, Mr. Chair.

It's not even mostly a budget. For the most part, it's what they call an omnibus bill. It purports to amend or introduce 51 acts of Parliament. It's unbelievable. She has to come to explain why this budget isn't actually about budgeting, because what this budget is about as far as I can tell is almost anything but budgeting.

Some of these acts are the Air Travellers Security Charge Act, the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation Act, the Canada Elections Act and the Canada Emission Reduction Incentives Agency Act. All these maybe are laudable goals, but they aren't about budgeting. They aren't about revenue. They aren't about expenses. They aren't about fiscal or economic policy. They're about all kinds of other things, so we're wondering what it is the Finance Minister is doing here. Why is she introducing amendments like this? some of the acts are the National Research Council Act, the Privileges and Immunities (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) Act, the Oil Tanker Moratorium Act, the Patent Act, the Pension Benefits Standards Act. I could go on and on. I'm not going to belabour the committee with reading the names of all 51 of them.

I want to say why this important. Just a few short years ago, in a bill just like this, the finance minister of that day, Mr. Morneau, introduced a 500-page long bill that included buried in it a clause that would amend the Criminal Code of Canada to allow the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to give a free pass, a deferred prosecution agreement, to one particular company, SNC-Lavalin. That led to a major scandal. It led to the destruction of political careers. It led to the first indigenous Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Canada having to withdraw or being taken out of her portfolio.

I asked the question of the officials the other day and you might recall this, Mr. Chair. Is there any single company that benefits from any provision in this bill, this 400-page document, that we don't have the opportunity to properly scrutinize?

They said absolutely nothing. We had 50 public servants in the room and not a single one uttered a word. They would not answer my question.

We have a lot of questions for the Minister of Finance.

• (6100)

I am going to take a bit of a rest, although I would like you to recycle my name on the list, Mr. Chair.

I know my colleagues, who are far more eloquent than I am, are ready, willing and capable of picking up these arguments and explaining to this committee and to you, Mr. Chair, why finding Free-land is imperative to the progress of this committee, and to making sure that Canada remains a fiscally responsible country with a government that is accountable to its citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

Now we're going to MP Blaikie, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll just remind the committee that I, in fact, support my amendment and will be happy to vote on it at any time. For the time being, I'll support Mr. Morantz in his desire to hear a more eloquent speaker.

The Chair: MP Morantz, you're back on.

No. It's MP Perkins and then MP Morantz.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was in the midst of reading a fascinating document about ministerial accountability before we entered all these procedural issues, which are about the issue of finding Freeland. I know that MP Blaikie in particular is excited to hear the remainder of the article.

Just as a reminder, because we've had some visitors in the room as well, on what I was speaking about and what it was from, it's an article by Dr. Scott Brenton, and it was published in the Australian Journal of Public Administration, volume 73, issue 4. I won't begin from the beginning again, but it's about "Ministerial Accountability for Departmental Actions Across [the] Westminster Parliamentary Democracies". It looked at four countries in particular: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

As we know, the United Kingdom is considered the mother of all parliaments that sets all the precedents and all the rules that flow from us. We all have our individual elements that are unique to our parliamentary and Westminster systems.

I was reading the second section of this academic study on this issue. I'll just remind the members and those watching that the section was called "NPN", which is an acronym. It was earlier in my presentation of this, but I'll spare you the search for that.

It's called "NPN: Clarifying or Complicating the Convention?", the convention being ministerial responsibility to Parliament. I won't begin that section from the beginning, but I will go back a sentence or two so you can get the context. I was about midway through a paragraph when we entered into the last round of procedural issues on this discussion about the motion by MP Blaikie to try to ensure that the Minister of Finance, who has not responded in a positive way to a number of invitations by this committee. It is the minister's prerogative to come or not to come, and she has not responded to some of those invitations.

We're concerned that on the most important element of her job, which is the budget and the budget implementation act, the thing for which she's most accountable to Parliament—not to the Prime Minister, but to the people who Canadians elect to come here.... There is nothing more fundamental than a budget bill, which is about the spending of your tax dollars: how they're spent and what the plan of this government is going forward.

This is a record-sized budget and spending. Over the fiscal framework—that's what we call the five years of planning—and this budget and budget implementation act, it's proposed to spend \$3.1 trillion: an incredible—an unfathomable—amount of money. The budget today for the government as proposed in this year is actually almost twice as large as it was in 2015 when they came to office, as are the taxes on Canadians that they are increasing. They will have gone up 96% by the end of this fiscal framework.

That's why it's so important that the minister show this record level of spending. It's essential that the minister come and be accountable to her colleagues. That's why this finding Freeland exercise of what we're embarking on is important. It's not parliamentary games or silliness. It's about the fundamental tenet. That's why these bills are called confidence motions. We get a lot of emails, all of us as members of Parliament, about wanting to see confidence motions in this government. Obviously, we feel, as do many, that we would like to see the government defeated on one of these.

Every spending bill of taxpayer money is, by Westminster parliamentary tradition, a confidence vote. That's why this is so important. In order to obtain the confidence of the House, the minister needs to be accountable to Parliament and to this committee.

On the sentence where I left off on the study, I'll just reread it before I go onto the new part. It was talking specifically about the United Kingdom.

Ministers were able to blame them—

• (6105)

The “them” means officials.

— for 'operational' failures as they were no longer able to issue orders of the day. In both the United Kingdom and New Zealand separation between policy and implementation was unclear in practice, while ministers were accused of interference and bureaucratic 'silos' developed.

This is about where I stopped.

It goes on to say:

Australia and Canada opted for more managerial autonomy within larger multi-purpose departments and closer ministerial control but with a more informal political separation that ministers describe as an 'arm's length' distance from administrative activities.

The use of 'contracts' has become politically popular, whether contracting out to the private sector, establishing purchaser-provider relationships within the public sector, or claiming that a contract exists with service users or citizens.

We know—and this is an editorial comment—that this government has made record numbers of contract-out provisions. We've had the McKinsey controversy. An excessive amount of the thinking, the policy development and idea development that officials used to make, this government has chosen to contract out to friends and, in some cases, family. “The use of 'contracts' has become politically popular”, as this says, in Canada, and that's certainly true.

While the latter two conceptions lack the legal force of a contract, all require greater specification as to day-to-day control that often shifts away from the executive, therefore supposedly increasing accountability.... Written contractual terms, specified outputs and outcomes, and agreements outlining exceptions and responsibilities in the administrative sphere have been mirrored in the political sphere with increased codification of unwritten conventions.

Codification has often appeared to be a response to a series of scandals or controversies and has increased in recent years.

That's certainly true with the government. We've seen scandals increase, both ethical and others, including the failure of this government to inform a member of Parliament that his family in China was being intimidated by the Chinese government. The government won't seem to admit what date—although the briefing notes are from two years ago—it actually learned of it. I suspect that means it learned of it two years ago, did nothing, as we know, is embarrassed and, in fact, doesn't want to be held accountable for its actions, as the Minister of Public Safety or the Prime Minister did not

act on one of those most fundamental parliamentary principles of accountability to Parliament in protecting the rights of members of Parliament to represent the people who sent them there without intimidation.

This report contains many tables. I won't read those tables because it's difficult to do, but it goes on to say:

Table [1] summarises the legislative and codified accountability roles and responsibilities of senior public and civil servants in relation to the convention of individual ministerial responsibility. Australia and New Zealand have some of the most extensive legislation, with the Australian Public Service's Code of Conduct also legislated.

I'll skip over the very lengthy chart they're referring to here, which goes on to the next page, as well. I'm sure members will be happy that I've moved on past reading those charts.

The United Kingdom has relied on convention more than the other countries, but the reform movement is pursuing further legislation.

The next section more closely examines codification within the political sphere, which has thus far resisted and likely will continue to resist entrenchment in legislation

We know—as my colleague, MP Morantz, referred to earlier—that this current government has this document called “Open and Accountable Government” from 2015. I think it's something that the Minister of Finance should actually read. I suspect that, because finding Freeland has been so difficult, we wouldn't be facing these issues in finding Freeland if she had not only read it a few times but actually committed the spirit of it to memory.

• (6110)

The next section says: “Codification of Ministerial Responsibility and Accountability”. It's that issue of whether a document like this code would actually get legislated, which it has in other jurisdictions. Codification of accountability in law would make it more difficult, I believe, for this government to escape its ministerial accountability and responsibilities, which we have seen often happen. It's “Oh, well, I apologize for giving contracts to my best friend and former colleague in the Prime Minister's Office”, said the Minister of International Trade in the House. She apologized for giving her untendered contracts even though she worked on her campaign. She said she apologized, and that's all the accountability that should happen.

That's the problem, to some extent, of just having a piece of paper that's not in legislation but is just guidelines. It's not really anything I have to advise or even read, perhaps, as a minister. But what this says is various codes of conduct, guides, manuals, handbooks and legislation have attempted to codify and clarify politico-bureaucratic relationships. This codification of conventions has been relatively superficial:

in the sense that general principles have been captured in written form, but lack the legitimacy and authority of written constitutions.

That's what I was referring to a moment ago.

The most legitimate and authoritative codes are legislative.

I'm going digress again.

We know that in the legislative world we have an ethics law in Canada that tries to legislate some of this codification on ministerial accountability and behaviour. Obviously, it has no teeth when a minister can get up and say, “Oops, I ignored procurement rules and gave a contract directly to my friend. Oops, I apologized. Wait, I did it a second time. Oops, I apologize and that’s okay.” That’s why this lacks teeth, even if one minister did or did not read it.

Again, it says:

The most legitimate and authoritative codes are legislative, yet these tend to be the most limited in scope.

That’s shocking, I think, to most people, that government would make them limited in scope. The paper says “Each of the codes do attempt to address each of the four key accountability dimensions” that this paper is outlining.

The paper goes on to remind us from the beginning of what those four accountability dimensions are. The first is “who is accountable and to whom”. The second is “for what are they accountable”. The third is “how are they accountable and by which standards”. The fourth is “why are they accountable”.

Those are four critical examinations and questions that we are facing here with MP Blaikie’s motion about trying to make the Minister of Finance accountable for the budget by actually showing up to the invitation from the committee. It would be a change, because we have been trying to find Freeland in many instances, both here and in the House. It’s incredible, really, to think that.

In preparation for this I actually did a count of the times since January that the Minister of Finance has been in the House to be held accountable, under minister accountability. I don’t know if the government members have done this. I’m sure they’ve noticed that the appearances have been stark, in this effort to find Freeland. If they haven’t counted them, it’s not hard to do. You only need one hand: one, two, three, four, five. That’s it.

You just need one hand to count the number of times the Minister of Finance has been in the House since January to be held accountable for a half-a-trillion dollar budget that she’s proposing. At the end of the five years it’s over half a trillion annual budget. That’s \$500 billion.

• (6115)

That’s one appearance for every \$100 billion that the minister is proposing.

I think that’s probably inadequate from my view, and that’s why this committee is so intent on trying to compel—which is really incredible—the Minister of Finance to be accountable for this budget in committee. The finding Freeland effort goes on, but apparently it takes \$100 billion of spending for each appearance to get her to show.

The paper goes on to talk about Australia and codification. “After a series of scandals in the latter years of Paul Keating’s labour government..”. Well there’s a surprise: a labour government had a number of scandals. Paul Keating was Labour prime minister of Australia.

You know that the Labour Party is part of the Liberal international organization where all the Liberal parties get together across the world. That’s not the Australian Liberal Party. The Australian Liberal Party, confusingly, is actually the conservative party in Australia. The Labour Party in Australia is the Liberal left-wing socialist government. They are the partner in Liberal International, with both the Liberal Party of Canada, which is a long way from conservative, and the Democratic Party in the U.S., which has become more socialist.

Their lead socialist spokesman is speaking this weekend at the Liberal Party of Canada’s convention. They believe in and love Americans, to the point that the democratic party wants Hillary Clinton to provide them with advice on how to win elections.

It’s an odd sort of thing that you would turn to Hillary Clinton on how to win elections.

• (6120)

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Fisher, welcome to our committee.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I just want to let the member know that we don’t need anyone’s help to learn how to win elections.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Fisher, for that.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Chair: MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: My colleague from Nova Scotia may find that a little different in the next election. You can talk to your former colleague about how that worked out.

This paper on ministerial accountability states, “Australia: After a series of scandals in the latter [days] of Paul Keating’s Labor government”—the sister party to the scandal-ridden Trudeau Liberal government—“Liberal leader John Howard effectively appropriated the issue of ministerial propriety as a central campaign theme”—huh, that might be a good idea—“and promised higher standards of ministerial conduct when he [came to power as] prime minister in 1996. He became the first Australian prime minister to institute a publicly available ministerial code of conduct”—leave it to a conservative to bring in an actual code, something that the Liberals try to avoid—“entitled A Guide on Key Elements of Ministerial Responsibility.”

It continues, “This practice has endured with each subsequent prime minister revising the code, and each version becoming less extensive.” Hmm: “This is unsurprising as the code provided ammunition for the opposition and the media”—it sure does—“and critics contended that it became meaningless after Howard’s initial enforcement of breaches by asking ministers to resign began to waver after the loss of seven ministers in...two years.”

Well, at least there was a conservative government that believed in holding their own ministers to account for their performance and that actually held them accountable for their performance. Boy, have we been missing that here. Even the Chrétien government made ministers resign. Not far from here, there's a riding called Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. The minister of the Crown then was a fellow named Don Boudria. I can remember him resigning because he took a free night at the Château Montebello—a free night at the Château Montebello for a couple of hundred bucks—and yet the Minister of International Trade here gives tens of thousands of dollars to a best friend, untendered, and she just apologizes.

An hon. member: The Prime Minister...?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Oh, right, it's the Prime Minister as well. He hasn't admitted to it, I don't think, but everybody else on the trip to London for the Queen's funeral denied, including the Governor General, that they spent \$6,000 on a hotel room with a chef and a butler. There was only one butler. I'm sure that was a hardship for the Prime Minister. But it wouldn't have been a hardship for the “finding Freeland” future prime minister, who maybe is out campaigning for his job now and not staying in \$6,000-a-night hotel rooms. That might be the inspiration for her campaign.

The paper continues, “Predictably Labor pledged to improve ministerial standards upon returning to government in 2007, and under Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard committed to a more compact set of Standards of Ministerial Ethics. This has largely remained intact, although renamed as the Statement of Ministerial Standards by new Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott in 2013.” So there were new ministerial standards and there was an open and accountable government.

I'm not sure we're getting open and accountable government when the Prime Minister and the public safety minister were briefed about Chinese interference in our elections and threats to an MP and yet did nothing for two years. That's not very open or accountable, in my mind.

In section 1 of Prime Minister Tony Abbott's updated code, under “Principles”, a couple of references are made to individual ministerial responsibility, particularly in carrying out their duties. Paragraph 1.3(iii) of the code states, “Ministers must accept [accountability] for the exercise of the powers and functions of their office...and the conduct, representations and decisions of those who act as their delegates or on their behalf—are open to public scrutiny and explanation.”

Furthermore, “Ministers must accept the full implications of the principle of ministerial responsibility. They will be required to answer for the consequences of their decisions and actions”.

● (6125)

That's paragraph 1.3(iv). What a concept, actually being answerable for the consequences of your decisions and actions.

When there's a decision to spend \$3.1 trillion over the next five years, I think it's not a very high threshold to say that the Minister of Finance, in this “finding Freeland” exercise, needs to be held accountable by the duly elected members of Parliament who are scrutinizing this record level of spending.

Section 5 of that updated Australian ministerial accountability policy is called “Accountability” and it goes on to say, “Ministers are required to provide an honest and comprehensive account of their exercise of public office”. What a concept. I'll repeat that one because that's really apropos of what's happening in the House of Commons these days.

Ministers are required to provide an honest and comprehensive account of their exercise of public office, and of the activities of the agencies within their portfolios, in response to any reasonable and bona fide enquiry by a member of the Parliament or a Parliamentary Committee.

I think I should repeat that because I'm not sure everyone was paying attention. So let me repeat that. Section 5 of the Australian code, called “Accountability”, says:

Ministers are required to provide an honest and comprehensive account of their exercise of public office, and of the activities of the agencies within their portfolios, in response to any reasonable and bona fide inquiry by a member of the Parliament or a Parliamentary Committee.

So let's just apply that to the current situation of whether or not we have ministerial accountability in this government. We don't have it, clearly, given the difficulty that the House of Commons finance committee has been having in getting the Minister of Finance—the “finding Freeland” exercise—to committee to be held accountable. How can you, when the total number of appearances in the House of Commons since January is five, each worth \$100 billion, as I said earlier?

The current Minister of Public Safety—and I know we were dealing with a subamendment on public safety—refuses to answer a simple question. On what date was he briefed on China interference?

Oh, did he? I'm told he did answer about the date.

What was the date? Was it Monday? It was Monday.

So the Minister of Public Safety was kept in the dark on the issue of China's interference with the member of Parliament, but as we know from the appearance of the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Ms. Telford, before a parliamentary committee—and she would never mislead a parliamentary committee, I'm sure—the Prime Minister reads everything, and in particular national security briefs.

So it's unbelievable that the Prime Minister wouldn't have known about this two years ago when the note came up. If he had, there's something wrong about Ms. Telford's testimony, and it says a lot about the Prime Minister's leadership that if he was briefed on this important public safety issue two years ago, he didn't inform his Minister of Public Safety about it—the person, and I'll quote from the Australian document, who is responsible for “the activities of the agencies within their portfolio”.

Why would the Prime Minister and the Privy Council Office not ensure that the Minister of Public Safety knew? Why would he know only on Monday, two years after the fact? That's incredible.

Ministerial accountability seems to be something very odd here, or maybe it's just a pattern, since apparently the Prime Minister rarely spoke to the former minister of justice about anything until the time he wanted to interfere in the charges against SNC-Lavalin, again, trying to override ministerial accountability. The Attorney General of Canada and independent head of lawmaking had integrity that we don't often see in this government and said no. She told the Prime Minister she wasn't going to interfere.

Now that's accountability, under the Australian position on ministerial accountability, that we don't seem to be getting from the Minister of Finance in her five \$100-billion appearances in the House and her desire to avoid being accountable for a budget that plans to spend \$3.1 trillion in the next five years.

● (6130)

While Australia also has a cabinet handbook, which was publicly available for the first time in 1984 and which has existed in some form since 1926, its focus is on internal operations of cabinet and ministerial codes, and the conduct more explicitly addresses individual ministerial responsibility.

It's much like the open and transparent 2015 Liberal government guide that guides all of cabinet, which primarily dictates how you conduct yourself in cabinet and that kind of thing. It has a very thin section on ministerial accountability and the role of Parliament. This is from a government that said, in 2015, that it would restore integrity to parliamentary committees, restore openness and transparency, return ministerial accountability and remove parliamentary secretaries from driving the agenda in parliamentary committees.

I sit on two other committees, and I've seen the parliamentary secretaries drive those. Certainly last year, on Bill C-11, I sat in and saw the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage whipping everybody and driving every single issue of debate. It was yet another promise broken.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It's more of a request, Mr. Chair, because I'm quite enjoying the exposition that we're getting on ministerial accountability. I share a lot of the concerns that the member expressed in respect of interference with the rule of law. I know he made reference to Jody Wilson-Raybould. I think there's a more contemporary example now. It's certainly a relevant one, and it's worth talking about. I wonder how he feels about... He's talking about Australia, and it matters because, obviously, various Westminster parliamentary systems are instructive for the Canadian context.

I know that the Premier of Alberta has reached out to the Attorney General to talk about specific cases, and there seems to be a question of interference there. I'm wondering if he could expand his exposition on the principles of ministerial accountability and speak a little to how that example reinforces some of the points he's making here today.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

MP Perkins, I don't know if you want to take that up.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's a very interesting question. As MP Blaikie knows, I'm a member of Parliament from Nova Scotia. I've actually never met the Premier of Alberta, so I cannot speak to the media reports, which, of course, some may feel are always accurate. I'm not sure I do, but I'll let the voters of Alberta decide that. I believe the election was called this week, and they can make a judgment on whether the Premier of Alberta acted appropriately or not. I always put my future into the hands of voters, as I did the last time when I defeated the Liberal minister of fisheries.

Back to the paper, the paper says Canada is next, so let's talk about Canada and our issue or history of codification or not, or pamphlets and legislation in these areas. This academic paper says:

Written guidance in the form of official documents or legislation is comparatively less extensive in Canada, with calls for a Cabinet Manual or something similar (see Russell 2010).

This was dated 2015. This thick-looking document, with a very thin section on accountability, was published by the new Liberal government. This paper says "calls for a Cabinet Manual or something similar", and the academic reference is Russell 2010.

The next sentence goes on to say:

Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State "sets out core principles regarding the roles and responsibilities of Ministers...[including] the central tenet of ministerial responsibility, both individual and collective, as well as Ministers' relations with the Prime Minister and Cabinet, their portfolios and Parliament". The current edition was issued in 2011 by the Privy Council Office under Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

He was one of the best prime ministers this country has seen. That was my editorializing. It does not say that in the paper, just to be clear, although I'm sure the author felt the same way.

Under Section I.1., "Individual Ministerial Responsibility" is firstly defined in terms of accountability to the prime minister, with the prime minister able to ask for a ministerial resignation. "Ministers are also accountable to Parliament...for all areas of responsibility, whether they are assigned by statute or otherwise"....

The most detailed section is I.3. 'Ministerial Accountability'. Ministers are required to be in parliament to answer questions on the discharge of their responsibilities and use of public monies, with political judgement resting with parliament.

The paragraph goes on, but I am just going to stop there and read the most important sentence in that section again: "Ministers are required to be in parliament to answer questions on the discharge of their responsibilities and use of public monies, with political judgement resting with parliament." This is Stephen Harper's code for ministerial accountability.

That is really what this discussion is about here at committee. It's not some esoteric or sort of odd thing that others may have said. Even some members of the government made some spurious accusations before question period yesterday about what this was about. The essence of this discussion is questioning whether ministers in this government are required to be in Parliament to answer questions about "the discharge of their responsibilities and use of public monies".

There were five appearances that appeared through the "finding Freeland" search I did through Hansard. There were five appearances in Parliament since January, at a cost of \$100 billion an appearance. I would like the cost of those appearances to be less. The way we can lessen the cost would be by having more appearances. That is what this is about. It's to conclude the exercise of "finding Freeland" and have the minister show up here for two hours and not ignore the requests of this committee to appear, when she is choosing to spend \$3.1 trillion of your money.

The next sentence in this "Canada" section says:

However, the prime minister can reaffirm support or ask for a resignation. Consistent with the principle of responsible government, it is said that ministers are accountable to parliament for all organisations within their portfolio and the "proper functioning" of their department (3).

• (6135)

That's why we had that long discussion at the beginning of the last meeting and this meeting when we were discussing Mr. Genuis's subamendment on the appearance of the Minister of Public Safety, because he is responsible for at least four agencies that this spending authorizes, including the RCMP and its performance as our community and national police force.

The paper goes on to say:

However, reference is also made to "appropriate ministerial oversight". Therefore, in relation to arm's-length bodies, "the Minister's engagement will be at a systemic level". Most importantly:

The following is a direct quote in this paper from Prime Minister Harper's guide for ministerial accountability:

Ministerial accountability to Parliament does not mean that a Minister is presumed to have knowledge of every matter that occurs within his or her department or portfolio

I'm just going to stop there, because I think many ministers of this government have shown that they don't have knowledge of every matter or any of the matters in their portfolio. It goes on to say:

nor that the Minister is necessarily required to accept blame for every matter.

I suppose that since the Minister of Public Safety only found out about something on Monday that national security agencies briefed the Prime Minister on two years ago, whether or not he should accept blame for the incompetence of the Prime Minister's Office for not informing him is a matter we should discuss at some point in Parliament or have before a parliamentary committee, if we could.

It goes on to say, quoting from Prime Minister Harper's guide for ministerial accountability:

It does require that the Minister attend to all matters in Parliament that concern any organizations for which he or she is responsible, including responding to questions.

Wow, what a thought, that a minister would respond. Well, I guess we allow responses to questions in question period, but there is a difference between responses and answers; they are quite different. We get a lot of responses from ministers in committee and in the House of Commons, but we don't get a lot of answers.

The paper goes on, quoting from Prime Minister Harper's guide for ministers:

It further requires that the Minister take appropriate corrective action to address any problems that may have arisen, consistent with the Minister's role with respect to the organization in question (3).

That's the end of the quote from the Harper guide.

Given that the Minister of Public Safety only found out on Monday about Chinese interference and threats against a member of Parliament and that this was kept from him presumably by the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister, who said he voraciously reads about national security issues, I would expect that the Minister of Public Safety is addressing that with the Prime Minister's chief of staff now as to why he was left out of the loop. Maybe we should get him a coffee mug: "I'm out of the loop, and that's the way I like it."

The next section is called "New Zealand". New Zealand is one of the four countries in this study.

While lacking a formal written constitution, the Cabinet Manual is self-described as "an authoritative guide to central government decision making for Ministers, their offices, and those working within government", as well as "a primary source of information on New Zealand's constitutional arrangements". It is endorsed by each new government, with the current version updated in 2008.

Remember that this was in 2015, so the "current version" in 2015 in New Zealand had been updated in 2008. Section 3 of that 2008 version of New Zealand's manual for ministers and public office holders says the following—

• (6140)

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, could you just hold that thought?

We're going to suspend now, and we'll be back after QP.

• (1340)

(Pause)

• (1545)

• (6345)

The Chair: We're back.

We left off with MP Perkins, and then we'll go on to MP Morantz after that.

Go ahead, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the break—well, question period, anyway.

Just to let you know, Mr. Chair, out of courtesy and assistance to our translators, I've given them some copies of the study and a few other things that I may be referring to, in order to make the translation easier. Bear with me. As I go through it, I will make sure I refer to the documents and the occasional pages to make it easier on the translators.

For those who have not been part of the discussion but are watching now, what we are doing in the finance committee is this: The government has proposed a budget implementation bill, as it's called. It amends a great many acts of Parliament, a number of which have nothing to do with the budget. Nonetheless, this is an omnibus budget bill. The government promised they would not bring in omnibus bills, and we are dealing with one.

What we have is a motion before us, and an amendment. The amendment to the main motion is what we're dealing with. The amendment to the main motion is MP Blaikie's amendment, which I think had a revision from MP Lawrence. It is asking that the Minister of Finance appear for two hours to defend the budget implementation bill. It's not unreasonable, but apparently it's a bit of a stretch for this committee, since the minister has frequently not responded to the committee's request to appear on various things.

Indeed, by my calculation, the minister has appeared in the House of Commons, as I mentioned earlier, five times since January. This budget bill, the budget implementation act, has a fiscal framework that spends \$3.1 trillion over the next five years. In fact, the annual budget for the government will have almost doubled since it took office. In year five of this fiscal framework, it will be over half a trillion dollars. By my calculation, at five appearances, that's—let me get my math right—\$100 billion per appearance by the minister. That's an hourly wage charged to the government taxpayers of Canada that is obviously something McKinsey would envy. I'm sure she's setting a new standard for them in the many new contracts they will get from this government.

For the sake of the translators, what we're talking about here is ministerial accountability and the parliamentary tradition in our Westminster system of parliamentary accountability. I've been enlightening the committee and those watching about an important academic study done on this issue, and I was citing the text of it before we went on break to go to question period. Just so the translators and the people watching know what document I'm referring to, it's the *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, volume 73, number 4.

Its summary reads:

This study examines the convention of individual ministerial responsibility for departmental actions in the four key Westminster countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The chain of ministerial responsibility traditionally began in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the public sector up to the minister, who is responsible to the parliament, which is responsible to the people. Many New Public Management reforms changed the roles and responsibilities of senior public servants, which arguably weakened the first link in the chain, despite being premised on increased public sector accountability. Various codes of conduct, guides, manuals, handbooks and legislation—

What they're referring to there, for example, in the current Liberal government, is a handbook—not law—that was issued when this government was elected, called “Open and Accountable Government 2015”. I'm not sure many of the ministers have actually read

it, given their performance in the House and what it requires in parliamentary accountability.

The summary of this paper goes on to say:

—have attempted to codify and clarify politico-bureaucratic relationships. They have generally captured the complexity of executive accountability and better reflect the original convention, while emphasising the preeminent role of the prime minister in upholding individual ministerial responsibility.

● (6350)

When we left off, I had just finished the section on Canada, where it gets into the detailed analysis. Like every academic paper, it spends pages and pages outlining the academic process of doing the study. It first examines Australia, and then Canada. I had finished that off, but, just to give you a sense, New Zealand and the United Kingdom come next. I have to go through those. I think it's important for us to refresh, because we may have people watching who weren't privy to this insightful piece before we broke for question period. Perhaps I could begin with the section on Canada, at page 474.

By the way, it is written by Dr. Brenton and is entitled “Ministerial Accountability for Departmental Actions Across Westminster Parliamentary Democracies”. That section of this academic study begins like this:

Written guidance in the form of official documents or legislation is comparatively less extensive in Canada [that's relative, I guess, to Australia], with calls for a Cabinet Manual or something similar (see Russell 2010).

We should remember that this paper was written in 2015, just before the current government's “Open and Accountable Government” document came out. It goes on to say:

Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State “sets out core principles regarding the roles and responsibilities of Ministers...[including] the central tenet of ministerial responsibility, both individual and collective, as well as Ministers' relations with the Prime Minister and Cabinet, their portfolios and Parliament”. The current edition was issued in 2011 by the Privy Council Office, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

I know we can all agree he is one of Canada's greatest prime ministers.

Just to make sure we're clear, part of what we're trying to do is find Freeland. It's the “finding Freeland” effort. With only five appearances, this is as rare, I guess, as the dodo bird, or perhaps as rare as a DFO fisheries enforcement officer arresting poachers of elvers in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

This is about the code set out by one of Canada's best prime ministers, Stephen Harper:

Under Section I.1., “Individual Ministerial Responsibility” is firstly defined in terms of accountability to the prime minister, with the prime minister able to ask for a ministerial resignation.

That's something I don't think this Prime Minister has ever done. I don't think so. We've even had many instances of breaches of Canada's ethics act by ministers, but that apparently isn't good enough for a resignation. The report goes on to say, "Ministers are also accountable to Parliament". That's why we're here today. We're talking about the Minister of Finance's accountability to Parliament, which seems to be a challenge in our "finding Freeland" effort. The paper goes on to say, "Ministers are also accountable to Parliament...for all areas of responsibility, whether they are assigned by statute or otherwise". That's in section I.1 of Prime Minister Harper's guide for ministers.

According to this study:

The most detailed section is I.3. "Ministerial Accountability". Ministers are required to be in parliament to answer questions on the discharge of their responsibilities and use of public monies, with political judgement resting with parliament.

That's our role: the political judgment that parliamentarians play in deciding whether or not what the government, the executive of our governing structure, puts forward in legislation and spending is acceptable to the people we represent. That's why ministers have to be held to account, not only in Parliament but also in committees.

The idea of answering questions, either in Parliament or in the committee, seems to be a challenge for the Minister of Finance, having not been here in the House more than five times since January, at \$100 billion a day. I'm not sure where the Minister of Finance is in her outside time, but she is not answering questions there and has refused on at least three occasions when this committee asked her to come before the committee to answer questions.

• (6355)

I've actually never encountered that. I'm on the fisheries and industry committees, and I have encountered the Minister of Fisheries agreeing to appear before for two hours and then showing up at the meeting and saying, "I'm only going to show up for one." I know we can't compel ministers to appear before a committee, but a courtesy to Parliament and parliamentarians, of which they are a part, would dictate that. The odd hour here and there from these very busy ministers could be spared for their accountability to democracy.

The study goes on to say:

However, the prime minister can reaffirm support or ask for a resignation. Consistent with the principle of responsible government, it is said that ministers are accountable to parliament for all organisations within their portfolio and the "proper functioning" of their department.

We've seen a lot of those issues in obfuscation and answers in question period. I misspoke. We don't get answers in question period. We get responses.

Even today, there was the issue of the public safety minister not informing the House of when the Prime Minister was informed that a member of Parliament was threatened by a foreign government because of his vote in Parliament. This government has known about this for two years, according to the leaked security memos that apparently went to the Privy Council Office. The chief of staff to the Prime Minister, as we know, said the Prime Minister reads everything he gets and he certainly reads everything from security.

While the Minister of Public Safety may not have known, perhaps he should ask the Prime Minister why the Prime Minister didn't inform him two years ago that this was going on. It's hard for the minister to be accountable to Parliament if the Prime Minister isn't sharing with him such critical information that goes to the root of our democracy.

The academic study here goes on to say this with regard to Canada:

However, reference is also made to "appropriate ministerial oversight". Therefore, in relation to arm's-length bodies—

This is the RCMP or CSIS, in the case of the Minister of Public Safety, and the CDIC or, perhaps, the Bank of Canada, in reference to the Minister of Finance.

—"the Minister's engagement will be at a systemic level".

Then it goes to quote directly from "A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State" by Prime Minister Harper:

Ministerial accountability to Parliament does not mean that a Minister is presumed to have knowledge of every matter that occurs within his or her department or portfolio—

The executive makes it clear every day that they do not know everything that is going on within their department or portfolio.

—nor that the Minister is necessarily required to accept blame for every matter.

We certainly know they won't accept blame even for their own actions of giving friends and family direct contracts untendered, like the Minister of International Trade, or taking personal vacations at \$9,000-a-night resorts in Jamaica, as the Prime Minister has done, or a \$6,000-a-night hotel in London.

The Prime Minister, I believe, has gone off to London for the very important event of the swearing in of the king and his investiture as our sovereign. I wonder if he's staying in the Holiday Inn in London, or whether he's gone back to having a requirement to have a butler and a chef in his suite, and a piano so he can sign *Bohemian Rhapsody* again.

The report goes on to quote directly from Prime Minister Harper's guide for ministers on ministerial accountability, which is what this motion is about. It says:

It does require that the Minister attend to all matters in Parliament—

That's a revelation. Other ministers have clearly done it in the past, but it's a little tough when you show up five days since January, as the "finding Freeland" effort continues.

—that concern any organizations for which he or she is responsible, including responding to questions.

• (6400)

What a unique idea, in our Westminster system, that a minister would have to respond to questions from the opposition to be held accountable in Parliament to the people who are elected to represent our communities across the country. But it's pretty hard to do that when the minister has refused to come on three occasions to the finance committee to answer and be accountable for the financial things that she is responsible for. This baffles me.

This is a friendly group. I don't see it as an acrimonious committee. I have been on some committees.... I can think of the heritage committee last year, where I went on Bill C-11. That wasn't exactly a collegial committee at the time, but this one seems very.... I don't know why the Minister of Finance would be so intimidated by the members of this committee as to not be willing to come and answer questions—but she can only answer that if she comes.

The report continues to quote from the Harper guide:

It further requires that the Minister take appropriate corrective action to address any problems that may have arisen, consistent with the Minister's role with respect to the organization in question (3).

It's very clear that for a long time, at least during Conservative governments, we held them accountable. We even had ministers resign for their expenses. But apparently that doesn't happen in this government, because it comes from the top. The Prime Minister sets the tone on accountability. When the Prime Minister is found guilty three times of ethics violations and doesn't resign or recognize that he has caused a problem and is entitled to his entitlements, he sets the tone for his management team, the cabinet; all they have to do is make mistakes and apologize and everything's okay. That's not in the traditions of the Westminster system, as we'll find out here in the next section of this report, which talks about New Zealand.

It says here “While lacking a formal written constitution”. Some members and people watching may not know that New Zealand doesn't have a constitution. As a parliamentary democracy, it is like Britain. It doesn't have a constitution. It relies on case law and common law and goes back to the Magna Carta for its precedents and how it does things.

The article says about New Zealand:

While lacking a formal written constitution, the Cabinet Manual is self-described as “an authoritative guide to central government decision making for Ministers, their offices and those working within government”, as well as “a primary source of information on New Zealand's constitutional arrangements”. It is endorsed by each new government, with the current version updated in 2008.

This was in 2015.

Section 3 of the Manual deals with “Ministers of the Crown and the State Sector”. In terms of roles and responsibilities:

They quote directly from this manual:

Ministers decide both the direction and the priorities for their departments. They should not be involved in their departments' day-to-day operations. In general terms, Ministers are responsible for determining and promoting policy, defending policy decisions, and answering in the House on both policy and operational matters (3.5).

You see, New Zealand has it right. They have it right, as the Harper government did—it's part of accountability and ministerial responsibility to answer in Parliament. In our country, Parliament means the House of Commons, the Senate of Canada, and all parliamentary committees in both Houses, to be held accountable. To not come at the courteous and very friendly invitation of this committee—three times by the minister for \$100-billion-a day work—Minister Freeland, in the “finding Freeland” effort here, is not even following the traditions in other Westminster parliamentary systems.

Point 3.21 refers to “Individual ministerial responsibility for departmental actions”:

• (6405)

It quotes again directly from the manual from New Zealand:

Ministers are accountable to the House for ensuring that the departments for which they are responsible carry out their functions properly and efficiently. On occasion, a Minister may be required to account for the actions of a department when errors are made—

That's quite a bit by this government.

—even when the Minister had no knowledge of, or involvement in, those actions. The question of subsequent action in relation to individual public servants may be a matter for the State Services Commissioner—

Obviously, this is a title or role that's different in New Zealand as we have no such role.

—(in the case of chief executives), or for chief executives if any action to be taken involves members of their staff.

The study goes on to say, on page 475:

A series of “Accountability documents” help to monitor departmental performance, including one-year performance information, statements of intent for at least the next three years, an output plan—

There's a novel idea. An output plan is required in New Zealand for ministers and their accountability. I think all we get is input plans. There are input plans of spending, input plans of intent, input plans of good wishes and fairy dust, but not much in the way of output. The measurement of success of this government is how much you spend, not how much you produce.

I don't think many of these ministers would survive very well in the private sector, except maybe Navdeep Bains, who left. He's done well for himself. Navdeep Bains was the minister of industry responsible for bringing down cellphone prices. When he left, we had the highest cellphone prices in the world. In fact, you'll be shocked to learn that when the minister of industry, Navdeep Bains, who was responsible for cellphone rates when we had the highest rates.... Every minister in Canada has a two-year cooling off period. Before the ink was dry on his cooling off period in January of this year, Navdeep Bains decided to negotiate with Rogers Communications to be in charge of their government relations. Can you believe that? Minister Bains, in his accountability, who feather-bedded the telecoms to have the highest prices in the world, went to work for Rogers.

Let me tell you about Rogers. They have the highest cellphone rates in the world. It's not just in Canada, but in the world. It's not shocking to me that the minister in charge of the highest cellphone prices in the world, after his two-year cooling off period, would be rewarded by Rogers with a cushy job in charge of government relations. It's the very same company he was responsible for regulating and allowed to become the most expensive cellphone company in the world.

Where was I? The study continues: “Crucially, responsibility for financial performance is vested solely in the minister”. Financial performance? Why, just in the fall, this minister, in her economic statement on the budget of the finances of this country, projected—this is something they hadn't said in quite a while; in fact, they hadn't said it since the 2015 election—a balanced budget. I think it was by 2027-28, a four- or five-year mandate. That was just in the fall. If the minister had shown up here at the finance committee subsequent to that, she could have been questioned, as Westminster parliamentary tradition requires, on the financial performance of that.

We know the financial performance of that. In this document, in the budget implementation act that we're talking about, there is no balanced budget projected in the next five years. In fact, it goes a long way out before it's even considered. In fact, this budget, in the five-year framework, adds \$130 billion to Canada's national debt.

I know that people watching and the members of Parliament here were all listening intently when I led off the debate for the official opposition in the House of Commons on this bill, the budget implementation act. You'll recall that I went through the sins of the father and now the sins of the son. When you take the combined financial performance of the father, former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and the son, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the total addition to Canada's national debt between those two members of the same family is \$1.1 trillion.

● (6410)

It would be enormously helpful for the Minister of Finance, in this “finding Freeland” exercise, to be able to come here and explain to us why she thinks that a balanced budget in the fall no longer can be balanced, and why it is a prudent fiscal thing—for all of us and all of Canada—for the Trudeau tradition to continue adding \$1.1 trillion. This government has never met a target that it has set, financially. It's blown the doors off, financially, with bigger debts than it ever has before.

One of the most interesting things is that, in order to meet that \$1.1 trillion or to add only \$130 billion to the national debt in the next five years, this government has to not introduce or spend one dollar more on anything new in the rest of its mandate. I don't think the odds of that are very strong. We see a lot of betting commercials now during the NHL playoffs, and I'd like to see some of those companies place a bet on the likelihood.... Vegas will do bets on anything. I'd like to see Vegas do the odds on this government's meeting any of the targets in this budget plan. I wouldn't take that bet. I'll tell you, though, that if you put \$1 down, it would probably make you a gazillionaire if the government actually did it once, by the odds that you would get. Maybe that's what's going on here. Maybe the Minister of Finance, in trying to understand this, is trying to understand her own numbers and figure out how this government put Canada in such a mess.

On New Zealand—and we're coming up to the United Kingdom, the mother of all Parliaments—the report goes on to say, “Crucially, responsibility for financial performance is vested solely in the minister”. Well, it's hard to do that if you're mysteriously not attending committee. I wish we could compel her more. I know we can subpoena witnesses in committees, but I doubt that...although it would

be great if MP Blaikie and the other opposition parties would agree, because I suspect that's the only way you're going to get the Minister of Finance here for two precious hours.

What does that work out to, two precious hours of her time? Let's see. Well, it's five days at \$100 billion a day to show up in Parliament on her spending. What does that work out to? My colleague, Marty Morantz, could work on that.

● (6415)

Mr. Marty Morantz: It's \$250 billion an hour.

Mr. Rick Perkins: As I said, McKinsey would dream of that.

So, for the minister to be here for one hour, that's a \$250-billion expenditure. For her to be here for two hours, that's a \$500-billion expenditure.

Now, I don't know. Maybe we should reconsider because that's quite an expense and quite an hourly rate, but I suspect that money will get spent whether she's here or not.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It's \$8 billion a minute, too.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's \$8 billion a minute. Wow. How many minutes have I been talking? I'm underpaid.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rick Perkins: The article continues:

with point 2.24 of the Manual stipulating that: “Under the Public Finance Act 1989, ‘Responsible Ministers’—

That's in quotes, and I would put that in quotes with regard to this government.

—are responsible to Parliament for the financial performance of the departments within their portfolios and for protecting the Crown's interest in those departments”.

I don't know that they're protecting the Crown's interests very well when they're saddling generations with now up to \$1.4 trillion of national debt going forward because apparently budgets don't balance themselves. I haven't heard that in a while, but apparently they don't balance themselves. In 2015, it was just a small deficit, just a little stimulus deficit for an economy that was booming. They said, “Don't worry; in 2019 it will be balanced.” Guess what? I believe it was a \$20-billion deficit in 2019; it wasn't balanced. Budgets don't balance themselves, and the government has given up any pretense of even.... Then it became a fiscal anchor. Well, this fiscal anchor is dropping us down quite deep. They do use anchors in securing illegal elver nets. I'll come back to that in a minute.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Did they cast that anchor aside?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It went from anchors to guardrails, and they blew through the guardrail. It was probably made of papier mâché.

The report from the Australian Journal of Public Administration written by Dr. Brenton on “Ministerial Accountability for Departmental Actions Across Westminster Parliamentary Democracies”—of which we are—talks about the United Kingdom, the mother of all parliaments, on page 475. Why do we call it the “mother of all parliaments”? It's because the first Westminster system was held in the United Kingdom. All other parliamentary systems, as opposed to a republican system, like in the U.S., are different types of electoral systems.

The first Westminster parliamentary system was held over 400 years ago, and all of our commonwealth and some Francophone countries come from that form of government.

The United Kingdom sets the rules and tone for parliamentary accountability, ministerial accountability and all of those things. It's really important for those watching, and all members of Parliament, to understand what the rules of ministerial accountability are in the United Kingdom, because that's ultimately where all our precedents come from.

This study on ministerial accountability for departmental actions across Westminster parliamentary democracies says this on page 475 about the United Kingdom:

Ministers in the United Kingdom have been subject to a confidential internal circular since at least the Second World War, which was published in 1992 as Questions of procedure for ministers. This became the basis for Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair's Ministerial Code in 1997....

He was probably the most conservative of all the socialists in the history of the mother of all parliaments in London, England. Most people will be familiar with him from his time and some of the movies about him, his special relationship with Bill Clinton and the stories around his term, when Princess Diana died and the reaction. All of those things are appropriate now as we consider the weekend celebration coming up with King Charles, Princess Diana's former husband.

Tony Blair introduced the ministerial code in 1997, which has since been revised during Blair's tenure and by subsequent prime ministers. Conservative prime minister David Cameron issued a new code in 2010, and advised that it should be read alongside the “Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform”, which outlined the terms of the coalition government with, at that time, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats.

Regarding the United Kingdom's precedents on ministerial accountability, the study goes on to say that one of the general principles of the ministerial code is that, “Ministers have a duty to Parliament to account, and be held to account, for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and agencies”. That is section 1.3(b) of the ministerial code.

You're starting to sense, I think, some similarities between these codes—the one of Prime Minister Harper, and the ones from Australia and New Zealand—because that's the tradition of ministerial accountability. The minister, as this says, has a duty to Parliament—not to the public, not to the media, not to the prime minister, not to Klaus Schwab and not to anybody else.

We all know the Minister of Finance sits on the board of the World Economic Forum. Ministers are accountable and have a duty

to Parliament to be held to account for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and agencies. Ministers have to provide accurate and truthful information to Parliament. What a concept.

● (6420)

It's amazing really, when you think about it, that you have to write that down, that you have to write in a code that an honourable member has to.... Let me quote again. For the policies and decisions and actions, ministers have to provide “accurate and truthful information to Parliament”. It's hard to not be accurate to Parliament if your attendance is five days at \$100 billion a day, and it's hard to check your accuracy and truthfulness to Parliament if you decline the finance committee's invitations to appear.

The study goes on to say, about this code, that they “should be as open as possible with Parliament and the public”. I don't know how you're open with the public and Parliament on this finding Freeland exercise on attendance records.

When I was in high school, if I had only gone to class five of the days since January, they would have called that “skipping class”. That was the pleasant way of putting it. I may have skipped the occasional class in high school, but it might have been five days in that time period that I might have skipped school because I was on football and other things. When those things weren't in, then I might have skipped a few days, I admit it, but I wouldn't have said my attendance was only five days. I think my parents would have had a bit of a problem with that. Perhaps we should be looking at that as an issue of truancy.

It should be as open as possible with Parliament. This is what it goes on to say, and I'm quoting from the report. This is directly from the United Kingdom's ministerial accountability: “Knowingly misleading parliament is sanctioned with the exception of resignation.” It is sanctioned.

We saw some dramatics in the House of Commons in question period today, and that's because we believe there are issues about truthfulness to Parliament with regard to how some of the responses were given on this issue of China interfering in the ability of a parliamentarian to do their unfettered work to represent their constituents. I would love to see some resignations as a result of this, but I suspect that's not going to happen.

It goes on to say, “Reference is also made to the Civil Service Code and the requirement that civil servants give 'accurate, truthful and full information' to Parliamentary Committees on behalf of ministers”.

We're actually dealing with an issue of this. My friend MP Beech is a former member of the fisheries committee and requested earlier that I perhaps say a few things about the fishery again.

The fisheries committee is dealing with an issue on the Great Lakes water commission. The Great Lakes water commission is a treaty obligation of Canada. For the last seven to eight years, while the budget has allocated \$42 million to \$44 million from DFO to the Great Lakes water commission to deal with issues like sea lampreys and invasive species in the Great Lakes, for some reason the amount of money that the Department of Finance...and I think the Minister of Finance would probably like to hear this, if the finding Freeland exercise were successful and the minister came.

I'm not sure that she's aware that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, while the Department of Finance gives them \$42 million to \$44 million, only transfers somewhere between \$32 million to \$34 million to the commission and skims off the rest for some unknown reason, so much so that we are now \$20 million behind in our obligations to the Great Lakes water commission in last year's budget. I don't know if the minister came with the budget implementation bill last year, because last year's budget allocated a 10-year commitment to the Great Lakes water commission on this fee. In fact, the government was so proud of this that the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard went to Lake Erie with the Great Lakes water commission and held a big conference in June 2022 and said, "This is fantastic. Now we have guaranteed funding. Everything is good again and our treaty obligations are met."

Guess what happened this fall at the fisheries committee. The Great Lakes water commission came to the fisheries committee and said they didn't get all the money. So what? It will keep going. The Americans will keep paying our bills. The Americans will keep spraying to kill the invasive species, the sea lampreys, so we don't lose all our commercial fish in Lake Erie. The Americans aren't going to be our patsy anymore, because they've withdrawn from the meetings of the Great Lakes water commission in the budget discussions because of this.

• (6425)

However, in the fisheries committee, the DFO official who's responsible for this came to the committee and said we've paid in full all our bills. The next witness after that was the head of the Great Lakes water commission for Canada, who said, no, they hadn't. We've been dealing with it in three meetings now in DFO—it's not a filibuster; it's a collegial discussion—arguing how best to try to get to the bottom of this. I think we've agreed to two meetings, but we're trying to have the Great Lakes water commission and the American side of the commission appear at the same time with DFO officials to see if we can get it sorted out and see who is telling the truth. We're in a he-said-she-said.

As this code says, ministers can't be responsible for every micro little thing they have, but the fact is that I think the minister would like to probably ask this of her own colleague in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans: Why, over all these years, has the amount of money not gone there? What did DFO do with it, since it was a treaty obligation?

I digress. For the sake of our translators, I will go back to page 475 under the United Kingdom report. The next sentence says, "Ultimately, 'Ministers only remain in office for so long as they retain the confidence of the Prime Minister.'" Apparently if you do the

Prime Minister's bidding, no matter what level of truthfulness the answer has, you're in good favour and can stay in.

Do you remember the trucker convoy and the Emergencies Act that was asked for by the police forces? It turned out, in a public inquiry, that not one of them asked. We're still waiting for an answer, even though the Minister of Public Safety, who seems to always be caught in these things, said it was only invoked because police forces did that. He said that to Parliament. I'm not sure why in the ministerial accountability rules.... Even in their own rules, which we'll get to shortly, the minister should be held accountable for truthfulness and open and clear answers. The system should be as open as possible with the public, and their ministers should provide accurate and truthful information to Parliament in Britain. I'm sure that happens in Britain. I'm not so sure here.

The Great Britain thing says here, about its Prime Minister, "He is the ultimate judge of the standards of behaviour expected of a Minister and the appropriate consequences of a breach of those standards". What the boss sets as a standard the employees follow, so we know why some of these ministers are refusing to be held to account and occasionally are infrequently familiar with the truth. The Prime Minister has set that standard for himself by breaching the ethics laws and being convicted of them three times. I'm sure a fourth one will be coming up on this latest Jamaican \$9,000-a-night family friend vacation.

Boy oh boy, do you know what my wife asked me after that story broke? My wife asked me how come I don't have any family friends like that, who can give us a \$9,000-a-night holiday. Apparently, by the Prime Minister's standards in interpreting his open and accountable government rules of 2015, having friends trumps.... I'm sorry. Some may be offended by that word. Having friends alleviates or excuses. It means I don't have to pay attention to any rules of conflict of interest or taking gifts. By the way, it's \$200. That's the limit. Everything over that has to be reported. He took a \$9,000-a-night vacation. I'm sorry, but I had to apologize to my wife for not having friends with \$9,000-a-night resorts that we could stay in for free, because that obviously is allowable under this Prime Minister.

It continues: "One of the most important and unique roles of departmental heads"—that would be a minister—"is that of the Accounting Officer". I guess that would be a minister of finance or the accounting officer in the department, but the U.K. term is perhaps a little different.

• (6430)

Here's what that says:

...the Accounting Officer, which is specified under point 5.3 of the Code:

Heads of departments and chief executives of executive agencies are appointed as Accounting Officers.

There you go. There's the definition. It goes on:

This is a personal responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which he or she is responsible; for keeping proper accounts; for the avoidance of waste and extravagance; and for the efficient and effective use of resources. Accounting Officers answer personally to the Committee of Public Accounts [in the British Parliament] on these matters, within the framework of Ministerial accountability to Parliament for the policies, actions and conduct of their departments.

Accountable for your spending.... I don't know. Pretty much every department has missed the budget set out for them, in both the budget and, I assume, the estimates. They seem to always go over, or we wouldn't have this growing deficit problem. I don't know why we don't hold our heads of departments and agencies more accountable for their financial performance, but in the United Kingdom—the mother of all parliaments—apparently they do. I know the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in their strategic and business plan last year, only met 52% of their objectives. They handed out almost \$20 million in bonuses. Imagine what they would have got if they had actually met their objectives. Maybe it would be a \$9,000-a-night vacation in Jamaica.

A voice: Maybe.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Maybe.

Page 475 continues, here, on the United Kingdom: “While the Coalition Agreement” between Prime Minister David Cameron and the Liberal Democrats.... That's not unlike the costly coalition agreement we have now between the NDP and Liberals that is further exasperating this. I'm sorry. Sometimes I get corrected by the Liberals, as they prefer their name to go first. Here, for the sake of congeniality, I'll say “the costly Liberal-NDP coalition”. It's very similar to what Prime Minister Cameron was having to deal with.

It says:

While the Coalition Agreement does not directly address individual ministerial responsibility, it does introduce a few possible variations. For example, it is stipulated that Liberal Democrat ministers—

They had a mixed cabinet.

—cannot be removed by the prime minister without consulting the Liberal Democrat deputy prime minister.

Wow. You know, the leader of the NDP should have read this before he signed his costly coalition agreement. He could have been a more powerful deputy prime minister. Since the current Deputy Prime Minister has an attendance record of five days in the House of Commons since January, we know the effective deputy prime minister of this costly coalition is the leader of the NDP.

Let me read again what the leader of the NDP should have put in his agreement for the costly coalition: “It is stipulated that the Liberal Democrat ministers”—the version of the NDP here—“cannot be removed by the prime minister without consulting the Liberal Democrat deputy prime minister.” I actually called him “the Liberal Deputy Prime Minister”. There's no reason why the leader of the NDP couldn't have had that title. I think he should be pretty offended by the fact that it was not offered to him.

It continues:

Positions within individual departments have been shared between the coalition parties, with the suggestion that junior ministers can act as a “watchdog” over

their coalition partners and potential veto points, which contrasts Westminster ideas of a dominant executive.

Veto.... I suspect some of that happens in the Wednesday morning NDP-Liberal caucus meetings.

On page 476, it goes on to say:

However, in emphasising unity, point 3.2 stresses that:

Consistent with the civil service code, all civil servants have a duty to support the Government as a whole. Special advisors may support an individual Minister in relation to their Government activities, but must at all times act in the interests of the Government as a whole.

● (6435)

While that's essentially in the costly coalition agreement, the NDP is required to report any shenanigans going on in committee that are against the government agenda, and so they have this sort of snoop policy in their costly coalition agreement. For a functioning opposition, it's a little hard sometimes in these committees to understand whether the NDP is actually operating as the opposition or operating as an arm of the costly coalition.

I think in this committee MP Blaikie is a fairly independent fellow, I suspect, like the colleague I share the fisheries committee with, Lisa Marie Barron. She is a fairly independent NDP member and I think she operates in a collegial way and probably isn't betraying any discussions on opposition tactics, but who knows here in this Westminster system, which is where all these things can come from.

“Ministerial Accountability for Departmental Actions Across Westminster Parliamentary Democracies”, an article by Dr. Brenton in the Australian Journal of Public Administration—for those who are just joining us, it's volume 73, number 4, and it's actually found on pages 467 to 481—says the following:

The United Kingdom has recently embraced—

Recently would be 2015.

—the idea of a Cabinet Manual, with the first edition published in 2011. It provides limited guidance on or insight into the scope of individual ministerial responsibility. For example, point 7.9 recognizes that: “Each permanent secretary supports the government minister who heads the department and who is accountable to Parliament for the department's actions and performance.”

It goes on to say:

Permanent secretaries—

I think those are the equivalent in Britain of deputy ministers.

—are responsible to the Cabinet Secretary—

That is the equivalent of our head of the Privy Council Office.

—or the Head of the Civil Service for the effective day-to-day management of the relevant department.

When you understand ministerial accountability and organizational behaviour, whether you're a business or you're in government, there's a limit to how much you can legislate or put in policy about people's own personal morals and ethics. You can't do everything. It's important to know that the tone is always set from the top in an organization, so this paper goes on to discuss, on page 476, the importance of the tone from the top in a section called Prime Ministerial Responsibility.

This paper, I think, will be insightful for those trying to understand why the “searching for Freeland” issue is happening with the five days' attendance in the House and her rejection of three invitations from this committee, because it comes also obviously from her direction—perhaps not her personal direction but the example set by the Prime Minister.

Here's what this academic paper says about this on page 476, for those reading from home:

While these codes and manuals are open and even vague in parts, they better capture the complexity of executive accountability than the NPM—

That was an acronym referred to in this paper earlier on, which I mentioned this morning.

—reforms and better reflect the political realities. They provide a basis for improving understandings of accountability in practice, if not actual accountability, and the role of the Prime Minister is appropriately emphasised.

While legislation underpinning the public service has often been used to drive or consolidate reforms, and public service codes of conduct articulate high standards and aspirations, ministerial codes are unsurprisingly less detailed and carefully worded. However they have effectively captured how the convention has evolved and is understood by significant political actors, and while they remain unenforceable—

That's because most of them aren't in law.

—they do debunk the myth that resignation, or even sanction, is at the heart of accountability. In many ways the codes have responded to, and arguably even reversed, some of the more radical elements of the NPM reform and accountability agenda by bringing the minister and the department closer together. Yet the ministerial codes and cabinet manuals do not strengthen accountability but rather recognise the current practice, which is still significant given misunderstandings of the convention.

● (6440)

It goes on to further state on page 476:

Returning to the initial questions, Bovens et al. (2008) public accountability assessment tool is presented in Table 3—

I spared everyone from my reading that in order to keep the journey alive.

—and the following key issues are addressed: why there has been a trend towards codification; how the trend developed and whether it is likely to continue; whether codification—

Codification is of open and accountable government, such as the one done by this government in 2015. That's codification.

—has transformed conventions to a more binding status—

“More binding”, perhaps, in some cases would be law.

—and whether accountability has improved.

As we know, there have been more ministerial resignations in the past. The more we impose these codes without teeth, the less we seem, in my mind, to get of ministerial accountability and resignations.

The paper goes on on page 476 to say:

Firstly, the trend towards codification can be mapped onto the public accountability assessment tool. As can be seen in the table, codification is a response to perceived failures of both ‘democratic’ and ‘constitutional’ perspectives of accountability, and a limited embrace of learning.

It is a shame and a condemnation, really, of our parliamentary system, that we've had to get to this extent to try to put in code ethi-

cal behaviour. You would think that people would naturally have it in their own set of moral standards, but this is the life we live now.

It goes on:

The original convention is so often misinterpreted and yet politically damaging. Oppositions seek ministerial ‘scalps’—

When we get in government and the opposition seeks my scalp, it won't be very robust. That's what God gave me.

—in the form of resignation, and promise to improve accountability through codes. While ministers appear much more likely to resist resignation—

That's true.

—this is actually not inconsistent with the convention, NPM reforms or the codes. What has changed is the issue of blame and the preparedness to accept blame.

That's an interesting statement. It goes on:

While NPM could be interpreted as a way to shift blame, at least for day-to-day operational matters, the codes are less definitive (although the New Zealand Cabinet Manual refers to this distinction). Politically, a further separation of the minister from the department in the codes would be intuitively reasonable. Yet there are other political risks, which explain the reversal of this strict separation in most codes. As Hood and Lodge [in 2006] argue, if civil servants are fired for government mistakes, they will be less likely to assist ministers during political controversies and more likely to act defensively and ensure that the minister can be blamed.

In a little while, I will go through Library of Parliament examples of some of those. With one of them, I have some familiarity from when I worked for Canada's foreign minister.

I'll go on on page 476. It says in the final paragraph of this page:

Secondly, the trend towards codification has generally developed through ‘official’ executive guidance (i.e. codes of conduct, guides, manuals, handbooks) more so than legislated, enforceable codes. Yet with each new iteration of a code, the application of the convention becomes less precise and more aspirational.

These codes and the ministers' responsibility to Parliament are at the heart of the amendment by Mr. Blaikie to try to get the minister here for at least two hours. I can understand the frustration of the committee in that she has not responded to three of the previous invitations to appear in this finding Freeland mystery.

● (6445)

At the top of page 478, the study continues:

Codification also appears to be leading to convergence as the parliamentary committees and the drafters of codes and legislation actively look and refer to the approaches of each other in attempting to establish a model. The difficulty, as with any convention, has been to codify a principle with enough detail, yet be flexible enough to be applied to different situations. Thus the common approach has been increased recognition of prime ministerial power, albeit not always in those explicit terms in every country. However, the fact that the codes are often authored or at least authorised by the prime minister further demonstrates the pre-eminence of the head of government in upholding individual ministerial responsibility.

This code of this government, from 2015, is referred to in all the mandate letters of the ministers—obviously, signed by the Prime Minister. In concurrence with this assertion in this study, it's even become more so now because it's built into a mandate letter signed by the Prime Minister, so it does come from the top.

To reiterate, it says:

Thus the common approach has been increased recognition of prime ministerial power, albeit not always in those explicit terms in every country. However, the fact that the codes are often authored or at least authorised by the prime minister—

This is the case in Canada.

—further demonstrates the pre-eminence of the head of government in upholding individual ministerial responsibility.

It appears that a trend has been established that each new government revises and updates, or endorses, an existing code, and this is likely to continue as it has become recognised practice—perhaps even a new convention.

There are similarities in this 2015 code by the newly elected Prime Minister of the day that, obviously, built on the excellent code of 2011 by one of Canada's greatest prime ministers, Stephen Harper, which was referred to in this study. Not that he.... To be fair to the academic who wrote this, the academic did not say that Stephen Harper is one of Canada's greatest prime ministers, but we, as Canadians, all know that to be true because I can't tell you how many times I hear from constituents how much they long for the days of Stephen Harper, given the performance of this government.

Page 478 of this report goes on—and I know everyone's finding this fascinating because it is an important issue in our basic parliamentary democracy. It says:

Thirdly, the legislated codes have come closest to transforming conventions into more rigid 'C' onstitutional requirements. Again, the degree of recognised separation between the minister and the department provides the crucial evidence. What can be seen through both the NPM reforms and codification and legislation is the legal separation of the minister and the department, which is a significant evolution from the original convention, and consistent with the expansion of departments and changing modes of governance. However, while the NPM reforms sought to clearly and definitively separate the roles and responsibilities of ministers and agencies—at least theoretically—subsequent codes and legislation seem to recognise the practical difficulties of such a separation by not specifying such divisions. Instead the minister is effectively accountable for everything, but in providing an account to parliament, does not have to accept responsibility.

Are those not words that this government lives by? Let me read that again, just so you know that I think it could be changed into this government's motto. Actually, perhaps it will be their campaign slogan in the coming election:

Instead the minister is effectively accountable for everything, but in providing an account to parliament, does not have to accept responsibility.

We see that every day in question period, obviously, with the responses, not answers. I quite often have constituents who pose questions about why the government doesn't answer questions but just responds, and I basically say, "You'll have to ask the PMO that."

● (6450)

This paper says:

The exception is New Zealand, which has retained its NPM-inspired legislation with only minor amendments, despite (or perhaps in spite of) radical changes to its electoral system that has further complicated the Westminster chain of accountability. New Zealand has also pioneered changes to the convention of col-

lective accountability, with minor party ministers often sitting outside of cabinet and some parties pursuing policy objectives through power sharing agreements rather than ministries. There are other notable cross-country differences, including where conventions have remained largely intact rather than weakened by contemporary political changes. The convention of Accounting Officers (Permanent Secretaries and agency heads) appearing before parliament's Public Accounts Committee in the United Kingdom developed before the convention of individual ministerial responsibility, and remains to this day. This convention has not been adopted in either Australia or New Zealand, although it could be argued that public servants perform a similar role in practice before estimates or similar committees in other countries. Accounting Officers have a much more limited role in Canada....

I referenced that earlier. Let me repeat that again: "Accounting Officers have a much more limited role in Canada, however there are frequent calls to emulate the Westminster model."

In some instances we fall short there. We obviously fall short in the ministerial willingness to actually appear and answer questions, whether in the House or in this committee. There is a truancy of only five appearances by the minister since January in the House in question period. The costly wage that it generates with the half-trillion dollar projected budget in four years is that it's a \$100 billion a day fee. That's what we get. Maybe it's a good thing she doesn't show up, or it might cost us more, at \$100 billion a day.

According to this, not me, it says:

Finally, the most important question is whether changes to conventions surrounding ministerial responsibility have actually improved accountability. There is no straightforward answer. Bovens et al.'s (2008) public accountability assessment tool provides evaluation criteria and questions, which are addressed in Table 3.

Again, I didn't read table 3. Maybe I should go back, since it's referenced so many times. It's hard sometimes to translate a table into words. It continues:

As can be seen, the evidence is mixed. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that many important conventions have not been covered here and have not changed. For example, public service advice to ministers remains privileged in all countries, as does cabinet discussions and advice to the Queen or Queen's representative.

I guess we are now saying the King, or the King's representative.

Breaching these conventions could arguably increase public accountability in one sense, but would affect other aspects of public accountability, possibly detrimentally. Of the conventions that have changed, it can be broadly argued that the virtue of accountability has weakened while accountability mechanisms have somewhat surprisingly improved.

The improvement is surprising given the usual 'headline' claims that ministers have become less accountable in contemporary politics, and 'no longer' accept responsibility of departmental actions.

I haven't seen much of that in our Parliament—accepting responsibility. It goes on:

Against the backdrop of an apparently increase in scandals involving ministers—

Of course, this was before 2015, so the number of ethics breaches and scandals aren't included in this paper.

On the top of page 479, the academic goes on to say:

—the main issue is often whether the minister had knowledge or direct involvement in departmental maladministration.

I would argue in Canada when a minister sole-sources contracts to friends, confidants, former co-workers and campaign workers without public scrutiny, gets caught in it not once but twice, and all that minister does is say “sorry”, that is not the appropriate responsibility for that minister in the departmental maladministration, as this paper calls those issues.

● (6455)

On page 479, it continues:

Generally, this is the basis of media and opposition pursuits for the ‘smoking gun’, and this is not detailed in any of the codes. However, ministers still have to account and may still be responsible for matters that they did not know about. Similarly, knowledge or direct involvement does not equate to blame. Rather, parliament has the right to ask about a minister’s knowledge or involvement, and the minister must not knowingly mislead the parliament.

According to these authors, that’s “quite a low bar when viewed against historical precedent”.

If this author had witnessed what we’ve seen in the last few years, I would say that is actually quite a high bar compared to what we’ve seen in performance in Parliament.

He continues:

Yet the chain of ministerial responsibility could be said to have strengthened with inclusion of central commissions or a cabinet secretary (or the Treasury Board in the case of Canada), mediating between the public sector and the prime minister and cabinet. This is a significant improvement. Yet the diminution of public service tenure and the involvement of the prime minister and ministers in appointing and dismissing agency heads could also be seen as increasing control, and while theoretically increasing ministerial responsibility, it also increases politicisation.

You can say that again. It continues:

In terms of Parliament, its committees here generally become more empowered—

I guess they haven’t spent much time here lately.

—and increased in prominence as a chief accountability mechanism, given that public servants appear before them. Voting trends away from the two major parties—

Well, that hasn’t been an issue here for a long time.

—and the rise of new political actors in all key Westminster democracies has assisted in strengthening these accountability mechanisms, particularly as internal accountability with the major parties has arguably weakened. The roles, powers and investigations of Auditors-General and ombudsmen have also increased in many jurisdictions. However codes and legislation are yet to adequately ‘account’ for a range of other non-government and private sector actors or party political actors within this chain. Increasingly attention is being paid to other blurred politicised relationships, particularly the role of ministerial advisers (who are subject to different codes and legislation to public servants)....

Well, in Canada they’re all subject to the code for public office holders. They’re not that much different.

On page 479, the author continues:

Entwined in all of these changes are the role of the prime minister and the ‘presidentialisation’ of this role—which is in itself a significant change to the convention. Fundamentally, the prime minister is the most important link in the chain of accountability. Most of codes explicitly recognise that it is effectively the head of government rather than the parliament that ultimately adjudicates issues of accountability, and if appropriate, imposes sanctions.

We know sanctions have been few and far between for the Prime Minister, except when the person refused to interfere in an ongoing criminal charge activity for SNC-Lavalin. Then he felt the need to fire his Attorney General for not being willing to intervene in a court case and to fire the Minister of Health, who also had the temerity to have the integrity to say that what the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada said was true. Apparently, truth to power in this government means the ability or the absolute likelihood of being fired from your job.

The author continues, “However, prime ministers are arguably less secure in their positions and the agenda is increasingly being set by actors with stronger accountability agendas.”

I don’t know where he gets that from. It must be from Britain, where the parties have the ability to change their leaders, pick new leaders and hold them accountable.

● (6500)

Here in our Parliament, the only party with the courage to take advantage of the Federal Accountability Act is the Conservative Party of Canada, which is the only one that has given itself the power that’s required after an election has voted to hold its leader accountable to caucus. Apparently, the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc chose not to have the leader accountable to caucus, and you see the result. We know that, as a result of that accountability, we have an amazing new leader in the member for Carleton, who will be the next Prime Minister of Canada.

Now, the conclusion of this report, but a long way from the conclusion of my dissertation on ministerial accountability, is the following on page 479:

The convention of individual ministerial responsibility still exists as a convention, and in practice is commonly interpreted as answering genuine parliamentary questions without knowingly misleading.

We can’t know whether, in our finding Freeland exercise, the Minister of Finance will be answering genuine parliamentary questions without knowingly misleading, because we can’t pose the questions to her because she has refused the three requests from this committee to appear, which is what has led us to this terrible position of having to have this motion. It’s insane, quite frankly.

● (6505)

Mr. Terry Beech: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I think the member opposite has forgotten the amendment we are currently dealing with.

Could we have the amendment that we’re currently debating read into the record just so everybody knows what we are debating?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thanks, Terry. I’ll take a breather.

The Chair: We are debating MP Blaikie’s amendment, and that is:

That the Minister of Finance be invited to be here for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18, 2023.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that, MP Beech. That was very helpful. The water helped. Thankfully I got some lemon before I came down here.

I believe this study has spoken quite specifically to why we want her to do that in terms of ministerial accountability, which is what that amendment by MP Blaikie is about.

I should say, before I finish this side of the report, that I do take requests and, if you would like, I do have some things I could say about the enforcement of the elver fishery and some genuine letters from constituents concerned about their property, but I'll finish this report first. It says:

There is less emphasis on being responsible for internal aspects of one's actions (or inactions) and strict codes are generally applied to the public service rather than ministers.

In other words, public servants are held to a higher accounting than, apparently, ministers are in some Westminster systems. I wonder who they are talking about there. It continues:

Accountability is socially contingent, and while ministerial codes can be ambiguous, ministers know they will have to at least justify their judgements, actions and decisions to cabinet, party....

Well, I'm sure they've done that.

We know that the Liberal Party has a convention this weekend, and we know that the Minister of Finance will be there, because they've advertised that she is going to have a nice fireside chat on election success with Hillary Clinton, who has had so much electoral success. I'm sure there will be a lot for the Liberal Party to learn from that, but that is the party in the finding Freeland issue. Perhaps the finance committee should set itself up at the convention centre of the Liberal Party this weekend and see if the minister could spare two hours away from her schmoozing with the former senator and first lady to be accountable for her \$400-billion budget.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It's \$490 billion.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry. I stand corrected. It's \$490 billion. I'm sorry. I underestimated her again.

The article continues:

The ambiguity at least captures the complexity of executive accountability and better reflects the original convention, while emphasising the pre-eminent role of the prime minister in upholding individual ministerial responsibility.

I could go on, as I have, about this Prime Minister setting the low-bar standard on ministerial accountability. However, I'll keep reading:

Furthermore, whatever codes say or do not say, there is media—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: On a point of order, I have MP Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I am genuinely sorry to interrupt Mr. Perkins just as he's getting started. His comments are certainly fascinating, but the interpreter is indicating that they don't have what comes after page 479. Is it possible to get them the document to make things a bit easier? Thank you very much.

• (6510)

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I apologize to the interpreters.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[*English*]

MP Perkins, do you have some help there for the interpreters?

Mr. Rick Perkins: This is the problem when you leave it to MPs to do their photocopying. I probably should have asked my staff to do it. While the fireworks were going off in question period, I was trying to sort this out in the opposition lobby.

If you bear with me, this is almost done, and we can move on to one of the other documents that the interpreters have copies of.

The Chair: If you could speak more slowly, maybe that would....

Mr. Rick Perkins: Perfect. That's a good idea. I have no problem speaking more slowly.

The Chair: It would help us all out.

Mr. Rick Perkins: If I'm going too quickly again, please let me know. I'm more than willing to slow down.

The Chair: Keep it slow for the interpreters and for all of our sakes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll have to go back, because I've lost my place.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Can you start from the beginning? I missed the first part anyway.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I did say I'd take requests and I've been asked if I would start from the beginning on this important document. I think repetition is probably not part of the rules in terms of speaking to a motion. As much as I'd love to go back for those who have just joined us and go through this in the Finding Freeland exercise, I will finish this document, as it is in the interest of helping the translators and moving on to the next points I'd like to make on ministerial accountability.

For the interpreters, I'm sorry I can't refer you to this. You don't have page 479, so I will go more slowly. It reads:

Accountability is socially contingent, and while ministerial codes can be ambiguous, ministers know that they will have to at least justify their judgements, actions and decisions to cabinet, party—

At this stage, previously, just in case interpreters didn't get it, there is a Liberal Party convention this weekend here in Ottawa. I suggested that perhaps it might be efficient for the committee to relocate to the Ottawa convention centre, now called the Shaw Centre, in order to find Freeland and see if attendance would be more convenient for her there, perhaps before or after her fireside chat with the former first lady and senator Hillary Clinton.

She has found time for that, but apparently hasn't found time to be accountable here at the committee for her budget of—I was corrected earlier—\$490 billion, as my colleague MP Lawrence said. I was underestimating her spending capability and I apologize for that.

The article continues:

—and parliamentary colleagues, as well as the prime minister. The ambiguity at least captures the complexity of executive accountability and better reflects the original convention, while emphasising the pre-eminent role of the prime minister in upholding individual ministerial responsibility.

Furthermore, whatever codes say or do not say, there is media and political pressure for ministers to have to provide some account of departmental actions. Often that account will be to blame the department or to claim 'plausible deniability'....

We saw that today, by the way, in the House, where all the evidence and leaked documents from security show that the government was informed two years ago about the attempts by China to interfere in the voting ability of a member of Parliament. We learned today from the Minister of Public Safety that he claims now to have only known about it on Monday. That may be true. It seems to me that it's a claim of plausible deniability. It could be incompetence or it could be that perhaps he's just not a player in the cabinet. While the Prime Minister's Office knew and was briefed—as we know, since his chief of staff said he reads all security documents—the Prime Minister may have kept him in the dark, as he appears to have kept other ministers like Jody Wilson-Raybould in the dark.

The article continues, saying, “but holding the department to account and instituting corrective action is part of a minister's role”, so I assume the Minister of Public Safety is somehow correcting the department's failure to inform him, as he claims. These CSIS agencies all report to him, yet apparently they told *The Globe and Mail* before they told him. I think it might take, as this author says, the minister to hold the department to account and institute corrective action, as is part of his role.

I'm surprised, actually, that he has time to come to question period now, because of this revelation. He obviously needs to be meeting with the institutions that report to him to find out what's going on there. He needs to be asking how come *The Globe and Mail* learned about this before he did—or before the Prime Minister, for that matter.

• (6515)

On page 479, towards the end of this study, it says:

The codes at least are an acknowledgement of the importance and existence of individual ministerial responsibility, which counters populist criticisms that it has become so weak as to effectively no longer exist. Stricter codes risk transforming ministerial responsibility from convention and removing prime ministerial discretion, which would have significant implications in these four countries...

I'll remind you that these four countries are Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. The report says, and I'll repeat:

...significant implications in these four countries as so many of the “rules” of the game are adaptable in order to accommodate changing political circumstances. Accountability has become more complicated so the convention has had to adapt, and while weakening in parts, is stronger in terms of being recognised as integral to parliamentary accountability.

That's the end of the paper. There are a long series of acknowledgements. Would you like me to go through some of those?

The author thanks “Jenny Lewis for organising and convening the Accountability workshop where this paper was first presented”. I think these people deserve recognition, because it's an important paper.

The author continues his thanks:

...Janine O'Flynn for coordinating this special issue with Jenny and Helen Sullivan. Special mention to Jenny Menzies and the two anonymous reviewers who both engaged with the paper and helped me to draw out some new insights. Finally, the University of Melbourne provided funding for a larger project through an Early Career Researcher grant, and this paper is one of a series of articles and book chapters.

I'd like to read some of those books and book chapters. I'm wondering, though; in Canada we have a lot of issues around some of the academic funding structures, such as, mainly, our granting councils and the actual amount of co-sponsored Chinese government research, but I won't go there because I want to stay on the same issue of ministerial accountability.

The Library of Parliament, which is an institution I know we all depend on quite a bit, wrote a background paper entitled—I appreciate my colleague helping me—“Ministerial Staff: Issues of Accountability and Ethics”.

It was first published in 2006, then revised in 2008 and reviewed again in 2012 by an author named Alex Smith. I don't know if he's still with the library.

I won't go through it all. I'm sure you'll be happy that I won't go through it all. Perhaps, though, some of the ministerial and other assistants there would like me to go through it all, because it deals with their responsibilities in accountability to Parliament. I will spare them that. Perhaps I'll make copies for them later.

I draw attention, for the interpreters, to page 2, section 3, called “Accountability”.

Mr. Chair, I will just go through this piece of research by our much-lauded—and deservedly so—Library of Parliament.

It says:

By legislation and convention—

There we go; we heard that in the academic study.

—ministers are accountable to Parliament for the operation of their departments.

Again there are similarities.

It goes on:

The senior public servant of the department, the deputy minister, is accountable to the minister, and in turn, public servants within the department are accountable through the bureaucratic hierarchy to the deputy minister. Similarly, ministerial staff—

That's for those around, and I used to be one of those.

—are accountable to their minister.

On behalf of the prime minister, the Privy Council Office provides general advice to ministers in a guide entitled “Accountable Government: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State”....

• (6520)

I think that document has now been revised under this government and has a new title, because they like to brand things with new titles but not really change anything. "Open and accountable government" was released in 2015.

I noticed that after eight years, it hasn't been revised. I don't blame them for not wanting to revise it, given the performance of some of the ministers in terms of ethics, because when these get revised, they become more difficult. Had this government revised this document, I think that they probably would have taken out some of these guidelines so that they're not in breach of their own rules and can continue to operate. Maybe it doesn't matter, since there are no sanctions for breaching these rules.

Page 2 of the library's report says in the last paragraph:

On behalf of the prime minister, the Privy Council Office provides general advice to ministers in a guide entitled "Accountable Government: A Guide to Ministers and Ministers of State", which includes a section regarding ministerial staff. According to the guide, "Ministers and Ministers of State are personally responsible for the conduct and operation of their office." While ministerial staff regularly interact with departments within the minister's responsibility, "[e]xempt staff—

That's what we call them here, because they're exempt from the rules of the public service.

—do not have the authority to give direction to public servants, but they can ask for information or transmit the Minister's instructions, normally through the deputy minister."

I did that job for eight years. I'd say it's a little different than what happens practically. I rose up through special assistant to legislative assistant to policy adviser to executive assistant to chief of staff in the Mulroney government.

I know most of the staff who are here. Maybe their parents weren't even born when that happened; I don't know, but sometimes you can feel old in this job. I know that the job hasn't changed that much and that I often interacted. A good political staffer has good relationships with people at all levels in the department if they want to get things done and work well with the officials to develop policy for the betterment of our country. I could talk about that role and how important it is, and maybe I will later.

If I go back to this page 2, the last sentence of the last paragraph:

"Good working relations between the Minister's or Minister of State's office and the department...are essential in assisting the Minister and deputy minister in managing their departmental work."

I will skip down now. For the translators, it's at the bottom of page 3 under section 4 of this report, in the section called "Controversy". These are some examples that Mr. Alex Smith from the Library of Parliament wrote about in 2006. It was revised in several editions, but the last time was in 2012. It's about the role of ministers and accountability.

I'll give you advance warning. The first example—

A voice: I can't wait.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I was involved in the first example as an exempt staff member. I was interested to see that the library wrote something on that, although I am a little disappointed they don't mention me.

A voice: That's shameful.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, it's shameful. They don't even mention my minister, but I will hear when the time comes.

Section 4 at the bottom of page 3 says:

On several occasions, the actions of ministerial staff have been the source of political controversy, which has raised concerns about accountability.

A voice: Like the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, the Prime Minister's chief of staff is a great example. Perhaps the library will update this paper with the most recent material, of which they have a lot over the last eight years to add.

The last line of this paragraph says, "The following are three high-profile cases." I know MP Beech and MP Blaikie will be particularly interested, because MP Blaikie's father was in Parliament when this first one happened. Now, I have to say it's on the Conservative side of things, but I'm sure his father would have been asking, if I go back and check Hansard, many questions in question period about this.

I will read the one example that's written here at the top of page 4, and perhaps add a little colour, if I could be granted that, to provide a little on-the-record detail.

A voice: Go for it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I could practice my French here, but I don't want to offend the interpreters.

In 1991, Mohammed Al-Mashat, a former Iraqi ambassador to Washington during the Gulf War...

That's the first Gulf War. I know there are people here who weren't even alive in the second Gulf War, but the first Gulf War was in 1991 when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

• (6525)

In 1991, Mohammed Al-Mashat, a former Iraqi ambassador to Washington during the Gulf War—

This says "discreetly", but I will explain that it wasn't that discreet.

—discreetly requested and received highly expedited permission to enter Canada as a landed immigrant.

The Iraqi ambassador to the United States was granted, during the war with Iraq, permission to be a landed immigrant in Canada.

When this occurrence became known, controversy erupted and the then Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark—

They get it wrong here, but I will explain that in a minute.

—said he could not be held responsible for this extremely sensitive decision, because he had not been made aware of Al-Mashat's application.

That is true, but I will add a bit of colour to that.

After an internal inquiry, the government placed blame on the associate under-secretary of state for External Affairs—

I'm sure some of you will be shocked to learn who that was at the time. His name is Raymond Chrétien. He is the nephew of future prime minister Jean Chrétien.

—and on Mr. Clark's chief of staff for not doing enough to bring the matter to the attention....

There was actually a parliamentary inquiry where ministers, shockingly, appeared before committee to answer questions.

Here's how the Al-Mashat affair, as it was referred to, happened. This is an important case in ministerial accountability.

In the Al-Mashat affair, you have to understand the diplomatic world. The longest-serving Canadian ambassador to Washington at that time was Pierre Trudeau's finance minister, Donald Macdonald. Now, Donald Macdonald and his wife...no. I'm sorry. It was Allan Gotlieb.

Allan Gotlieb and his wife were known to throw quite lavish parties at the Canadian embassy. They were a *tour de force* in Washington, but by 1991, Allan Gotlieb was no longer the ambassador in Washington. He was in private practice in Toronto.

Allan Gotlieb's protege was a fellow coming up through the diplomatic ranks named Raymond Chrétien. His role in 1991 was in the department that was then called external affairs. That was when I was executive assistant to the foreign minister, Barbara McDougall.

This gets a little complicated, so try to follow me.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay. It's really tough, but I'm really enjoying it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The Al-Mashat affair was about the fact that... Raymond Chrétien's title was associate undersecretary of state for the Department of External Affairs—in other words, the second-in-command in external affairs. At that time, the deputy minister was called the undersecretary of state, and he was the associate undersecretary of state. My boss, and Joe Clark before her, were called the secretary of state.

As the second-in-command, Raymond Chrétien's job was to decide who went on what postings in the annual shuffling of the deck of foreign affairs diplomats. He was in charge of that, a very powerful guy. Mohammed Al-Mashat had been the Iraqi ambassador in Washington when Allan Gotlieb was the Canadian ambassador to Washington.

What did Al-Mashat do as the serving Iraqi ambassador when we were fighting Iraq in the Gulf War?

I can tell you what he did. He didn't apply through the normal channel that people use in our immigration system, which I believe now has a backlog of 2.4 million. He didn't apply through the normal channel. Mohammed Al-Mashat phoned his buddy Allan Gotlieb, and Allan Gotlieb gave him a little advice and said, "Hang on; let me talk to Raymond Chrétien." This all came out in the parliamentary inquiry when ministers came and testified.

Allan Gotlieb phoned the second-in-command at the bureaucratic level, Raymond Chrétien, and said, "I've got this friend. He doesn't want to go back. He wants to stay here. He's a good guy. Can we get him into Canada as a landed immigrant?" Raymond Chrétien decides on a Friday afternoon at about five o'clock at night—be-

cause that's when these things happen in Ottawa, on Fridays at five o'clock—to send a memo up to the minister's office, to the departmental assistant to the minister of external affairs, Joe Clark, and also to the minister of immigration, Barbara McDougall, who at that time was my boss, because believe it or not, back then all of the people in the posts abroad who processed immigration applications were actually employees of external affairs, not employees of the department of immigration.

When this memo came up, my boss said, "Absolutely not", and wrote in handwriting across the thing that as minister of immigration she would not approve this person to come into Canada.

I remember when the memo came up. When the memo came up in the office of the secretary of state of external affairs, Joe Clark, the minister was out of the country, as the minister often is in that role, and the minister's departmental assistant put it forward to the chief of staff, who sort of looked at it and just didn't think much of it and agreed with whatever the department said.

That's always a danger for political staff. As a warning to the folks behind us on both sides, don't always take everything that the department says as gospel and think that the motivations are always pure.

All of this was secret and wasn't known, and one month later there was a cabinet shuffle, in 1991, and Joe Clark was shuffled to intergovernmental affairs to deal with constitutional issues. You might remember Meech Lake and the Charlottetown accord from your history books.

My boss was shuffled to foreign affairs, and back then, the exempt staff went with the ministers. They didn't go home and wait for PMO to tell them if they had a job or not; they actually went with the ministers, so we were in external affairs. The department was doing its initial briefing and up comes this memo, approved on the Autopen, not by the minister. The staff probably know what the Autopen is; it's an automatic pen used to sign the minister's signature, but the minister doesn't actually sign. The memo approved Al-Mashat as a landed immigrant in Canada because he had gone, as Raymond Chrétien had arranged, to Belgium to apply to come to Canada from the United States.

● (6530)

He went to Belgium because Raymond Chrétien sent a memo to the head of immigration in Belgium and said, "I've got this friend I want to fast-track. I want to fast-track him into Canada. I would appreciate it if you would do it." He did, because of course what else—

Mr. Brad Vis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I just want to state very clearly how much I appreciate the encyclopedic knowledge of my colleague from Nova Scotia. There are not many members of Parliament who can speak so eloquently and clearly about every little thing that happened in the Mulroney government. It's really quite amazing and it always blows my mind, so I just want to say thank you for having me here for this short period of time.

Thank you for really quite an entertaining half an hour. Keep it up, my friend, and take care.

• (6535)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Did I miss Mr. Perkins being promoted to whip of the Conservative Party?

An hon. member: He wouldn't want that job.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: MP Perkins, the floor is yours again.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank MP Vis.

I'm still on 1991. It was nice cabinet shuffle, and I have to say it was a great thing. I tell you, I can remember the day when we got shuffled to foreign affairs. It is a great and incredibly prestigious post to have. It was a fascinating time to be there, with the Gulf War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the coup in Haiti, the situation in South Africa and the negotiation of NAFTA.

I could go on with the issues we were dealing with there, but I'll get back to the Al-Mashat affair and ministerial accountability.

Raymond Chrétien sends this note off to Belgium and directs the foreign affairs employee who is doing the immigration there to process this for his buddy. Of course he did, because you know what Raymond Chrétien can do if he doesn't do it? He can send him, not to Paris on his next posting, and not to London on his next posting, and certainly not to Washington on his next posting; he could send him to what are called "hardship posts" if he didn't go along.

In foreign affairs, hardship posts could be places like Sri Lanka. Foreign service officers want to go to Paris, London and Washington, where the game is played; they don't want to be lost and buried in the department in hardship posts. It's tough on them and it's tough on their families. Of course the poor immigration officer approved what his boss, Raymond Chrétien, said, which was to approve this application.

Of course none of this was known, so when my boss gets to foreign affairs, up comes this note saying that he had approved it. We still had the memo, because back then we kept paper. We still had the copy of the memo from my minister, as immigration minister, saying that in no way is this person supposed to be allowed into Canada as a landed immigrant, yet he somehow got here through this circuitous route. We didn't know how he got here, so the question on ministerial accountability became, what do we do with this?

Here you have a new secretary of state who has been on the job just a few weeks and is dealing with a coup in Moscow where the military threw Mikhail Gorbachev out of his job. Then we discover that the department actually had done something totally against the immigration minister's orders.

I can tell you the first thing we did. They didn't like this too much in foreign affairs. My boss signed an order to make all of the foreign affairs officers who worked on immigration employees of the Department of Immigration, so that the Minister of Immigration could now control and make sure that the Minister of Immigration's decisions were abided by and not overrun by another department. That made things clear and that is still today.

We had a big decision to make because there was a huge scandal on this issue. It was very public in the press. My minister certainly was not going to take responsibility for the Iraqi ambassador coming into Canada during a war as a landed immigrant when she, as immigration minister, had said no. What were we to do?

We laid it clear at the parliamentary committee. We actually attended the parliamentary committee. There was no finding Freeland issue here. There was no "only five days in Parliament in five months, one day a month". There was no half-a-trillion-dollar proposal budget for us over a fiscal framework, which means \$100 billion a day that we pay this finance minister and all those other truancy days.

• (6540)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Times have changed.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Like I said, we should probably go to the Liberal convention this weekend with the committee and maybe we could get her to appear.

In the Al-Mashat case, we went to committee, and we laid it out straight—all of what I've just informed you of. You can look it up in the Hansard record. It's fascinating reading, I tell you. I wish we had ParlVu back then, because there would be a better video record of my new boss, the former secretary of state, the Honourable Barbara McDougall—

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): A fine woman....

Mr. Rick Perkins: —the Right Honourable Joe Clark; the under-secretary of state for external affairs of the day, a fellow named Reid Morden, who had come from CSIS, actually; and the associate under-secretary of state for external affairs, the nephew of the future prime minister and then opposition leader to the government, Raymond Chrétien.

A voice: Really.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Raymond Chrétien got called on the carpet and was brought out.

As this parliamentary library report, in its first of several ministerial accountability controversies, outlines—quite subtly, I think—after an internal inquiry that was done within the government.... It doesn't mention the parliamentary inquiry, so perhaps our Library of Parliament support here and in the foreign affairs committee would like to actually update this 2006-12 report with some of the more modern things on ministerial accountability, which this motion of MP Blaikie is bringing to fruition.

It goes on. I know that committee members and those watching will be...as we move through time to 2004. That was not long ago. It was still a Liberal government. The newly merged Conservative Party from the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance.... The new leader was the Right Honourable.... Well, he was just Stephen Harper then, leader of the opposition. The Honourable Stephen Harper became the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, one of our best prime ministers, only two years later.

In 2004, again, we had another situation where we didn't have to fight this finding Freeland thing. We had an incident when the then minister of citizenship and immigration.... I know some of you will recognize this name here, because this person still sits in the House. In fact, last weekend in Toronto I went to an event with her—the Vietnam freedom day. It was an honour to go to the Vietnam freedom day. Judy Sgro was speaking on behalf of the Government of Canada, and I was speaking on behalf of our leader, Pierre Poilievre, the next prime minister of Canada.

That event is an important foreign affairs.... It marks the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. I was in junior high, just to be clear. I wasn't in the government then.

In 1979, of course, one of the most important things was the boat people from Vietnam, and how to deal with them. It was a big issue. Back then Canada was only accepting 10,000 to 12,000 refugees a year.

The newly elected government of the Right Honourable Joe Clark, in 1979, had to face this as one of their first issues. That issue was what to do with the hundreds of thousands of people unsafely risking their lives trying to leave Vietnam in a boat. Families and thousands of people were dying on the ocean to escape communism and seek freedom—something we all love and are privileged to enjoy here.

One of the things that happened then was the Joe Clark government considered what they should do. They had a fellow named Ron Atkey, the member of Parliament for St. Paul's. That riding is currently held by Dr. Carolyn Bennett. Ron Atkey was the new immigration minister—a lawyer.

The then foreign affairs secretary of state for external affairs was a woman named Flora Macdonald. In fact, Flora MacDonald represented Kingston and the Islands. It is currently held by, as we know, MP Gerretsen. Kingston and the Islands, the home of Sir John A. Macdonald, was represented by Flora MacDonald, a descendant of Sir John A. Flora was Canada's first female foreign affairs minister. It was a very important time in Canada's history.

They had to face this crisis of Vietnam. They decided to allow in an unprecedented—until recently—level of Vietnamese refugees, boat people. In less than a year, 42,000 were brought to Canada.

A voice: That's amazing.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That number has now gone up. The number of refugees trying to escape communism moved up in the early nineties to over 140,000. Because of the impetus of a Conservative government of Canada, we have a strong and vibrant Vietnamese community here in Canada. Now, that's ministerial accountability. That's ministerial action. That's coming to parliamentary commit-

tees and seeking parliamentary approval for important actions that change generations, lives and Canada for the better, which, after all, is why we are here.

• (6545)

I had a chat with Judy Sgro at that particular event. Here's what the Library of Parliament writes about 2004:

...the then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Judy Sgro, was accused of giving temporary residence and work permits to people who had volunteered on the Minister's re-election campaign. The Ethics Commissioner was asked to investigate the alleged conflict of interest. The Commissioner concluded that the main burden of responsibility for placing the Minister in a conflict of interest lay with the Minister's chief of staff, who continued to work on departmental matters during the election. The Commissioner said that this did not absolve the Minister of responsibility....

There's that term again: "ministerial responsibility". To have ministerial responsibility, you have to show up. You have to show up to work. You have to show up.

Jack Layton once famously said, I believe it was of Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff, in a debate, that Canadians pay you to show up to work and it would be nice if you decided to do so once in a while. It appears Michael Ignatieff's approach to Parliament and disdain for Parliament has now become that of the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): He lost his seat when it came around.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He lost his seat. That leader was clearly just visiting, because, as soon as he lost his seat and that election...the lowest vote in Liberal Party history since Confederation, I might add. Because of his lack of attendance, that Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, lost his seat. Do you know what? What I truly loved about that campaign was that Michael Ignatieff proved us right: He was just visiting. It took him nothing short of a few months to move out of this country again—

Mr. Eric Duncan: If you don't show up, you lose.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —making truth in politics the cornerstone of what we, as Conservatives, run on.

Liberals, draw your own conclusions.

To go on with the report of the Library of Parliament on the personal use of immigration temporary residence and work permits by the then minister of immigration, using her ministerial power for her own benefit, the library writes, "The Commissioner said that did not"—as I said—"absolve the minister of responsibility, quoting from Privy Council Office guidance stating that ministers are responsible for the actions of officials under their management; but he noted that the meaning of 'responsibility' in this context was rather vague."

Can you imagine the definition under a Liberal government of "responsibility" being vague? I will leave that to all those watching Parliament today and the scandals we see.

The Library, at page 4, then goes on to write, “In his 2004-2005 investigation into the Sponsorship Program”—we all remember that well—“administered by Public Works and Government Services Canada, Justice Gomery concluded that there was direct input by the then minister and his staff, as well as the chief of staff for the prime minister,”—man, these things sound familiar; I wonder what this is reminding me of today—“regarding the selection of particular activities for sponsorship supporting the Government of Canada.”

I will stop right there for a moment, so I can remind those who don't remember that the minister and the prime minister were using taxpayer dollars to funnel to advertising programs, particularly in the province of Quebec, that were run through Liberal operatives and were used for such things as financing a golf course in Shawinigan, the then prime minister's riding, currently held by the effervescent minister of industry.

• (6550)

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to take this chance to ask for clarification and allow my colleague to get a sip of water and collect his voice.

We have been listening for almost two hours and four minutes or something like that. I'm seeking clarification. Is he speaking for or against the amendment?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate MP Beech's intervention.

The Chair: The amendment again, I'll just read it out.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, please do. Could I ask you to read out the whole motion?

The Chair: It's the subamendment that MP Blaikie has put forward, and I think that the majority of the members are in agreement with it,

That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we previously were debating a subamendment by Mr. Genuis on adding the Minister of Public Safety to this, and I know that we weren't successful in getting that amendment to the motion through, unfortunately, but it would have been, given the circumstances in the House these last few days, a good time. Again, it goes to the issue of ministerial accountability.

There are probably other ministers who should be added to this list, but—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Just on that same point of order, Mr. Chair, I am curious to know if Mr. Perkins in his remarks will speak to the question of deficit financing in the Mulroney government and how that relates to ministerial responsibility as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'd be thrilled to.

Would MP Blaikie like me to go now? Could I do that at the end of this Library of Parliament...? Then I'll explain—

Mr. Eric Duncan: We're only in 1991.

Mr. Rick Perkins:—how \$468 billion of deficit financing from Pierre Trudeau resulted in what we saw later on.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I would say certainly don't skip over the part where MP Sgro at the time also used ministerial permits to aid and abet the sex trafficking industry, which I think was another scandal that came up while Minister Sgro was the immigration minister, which I'm sure you're coming to.

Mr. Rick Perkins: She had to resign—didn't she?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: After that, if you could provide some reflections on the state of deficit financing in the Mulroney government, I'm sure members of the committee will be glad to hear it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: MP Blaikie, thank you for that reminder. I don't believe it's in the Library of Parliament report, but perhaps it's another element that somebody could take on in the library in updating this fine document.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Maybe the analysts.

Mr. Rick Perkins: MP Blaikie, maybe you can enlighten us on that particular scandal when you come to speak next. I would appreciate hearing about it.

I have trouble—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Perhaps right after we vote on my subamendment.

Mr. Rick Perkins: If I spoke to every scandal, particularly during the last eight years, we would be here for quite a while. I can't believe, as MP Beech said, that it's been two hours already. Time flies when you're having fun.

The peanut gallery here is saying, for those who can't hear, that at least one of us is having fun.

Now where was I?

Yes, it was Justice Gomery. Let me just reiterate for those watching that on the Gomery inquiry on the sponsorship scandal, it said:

Justice John Gomery concluded that there was direct input by the then minister and his staff, as well as the chief of staff for the prime minister, regarding the selection of particular activities for sponsorship support by the Government of Canada.

I think in fact one Liberal operator went to jail over this.

Justice Gomery determined that this constituted "inappropriate political encroachment into the administrative domain". Moreover, the deputy minister at the time was not kept informed of interactions between the minister's office and bureaucrats in charge of the program.

Justice Gomery recommended that the government prepare a code of conduct for ministerial staff, which would include provisions that “exempt staff have no authority to give direction to public servants and that Ministers are fully responsible and accountable for the actions of exempt staff. Justice Gomery also recommended that, to help them understand their role, “all exempt staff should be required to attend a training program to learn the most important aspects of public administration.”

In the search for Freeland, I will add on a personal note that it is because of the six degrees of separation rule. It is interesting that this parliamentary report quotes from the Gomery inquiry because the author for the Gomery inquiry, or who helped to write the report, was a fellow named Ian Sadinsky, a good friend of mine, actually, who actually was—and it comes around—Barbara McDougall's speech writer when she was a minister.

An hon. member: Really.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's just a coincidence.

● (6555)

Mr. Damien Kurek: The connections....

Mr. Rick Perkins: The connections are amazing.

For the interpreters, the last paragraph is on page 4:

As ministerial staff often act on behalf of their minister and serve as a buffer between the department and the minister, they wield considerable influence, if not de facto authority. While they are not to direct public servants, there is a lack of clarity about what constitutes appropriate interactions with public servants.

These examples demonstrate how this lack of clarity has led to disputes over the proper role of ministerial staff and what it means for a minister to be responsible and accountable for the actions when controversy arises. Apart from the brief advice provided in the Privy Council Office's Accountable Government guide noted above, the role of ministerial staff remains relatively undefined.

The next section here is on the standards of ethical conduct, but maybe I'll come back to that in a moment to try to answer MP Blaikie's question. I don't want him to forget that he asked it, and I want people to understand the context of that.

People who are watching may have seen these graphics on social media that show that the current government has added more to the public debt than all other governments combined. That's why we'd like the minister responsible for the finance department to show up per our request and be here. She needs to be accountable for the fact that she has played a major role, she and her predecessor Bill Morneau, or, as the Prime Minister calls him, a "random Liberal". In certain respects, it may be something that's whispered at the Liberal Party convention this weekend, "Bill no more", as someone affectionately called him. The two finance ministers combined, along with their boss—the one thing that links both of them—have added more to the public debt than all other prime ministers.

To MP Blaikie's comments, how does that fare? We have a national debt at the end of this five-year fiscal framework of somewhere between \$1.3 trillion or \$1.4 trillion. As I said, if, during the rest of this mandate, this government doesn't spend a dollar more on new programs....

I should add, and I know I tend to digress sometimes, but these ideas come into my head. The minister of industry—I am the shadow minister for industry—as we know, recently made a commitment of \$14 billion to Volkswagen. The amount of \$778 million used to be an astronomical sum when we talked about it, but they will spend \$778 million of taxpayers' money assisting Volkswagen in building this EV battery plant. Then we'll spend \$13 billion in subsidizing Volkswagen's operations.

Now, I have to tell you that I've looked a lot through these budget documents, and I know the \$778 million is included in the SIF program, as it's called. I sometimes refer to it as the "sieve program",

but the SIF program is a program where this government chooses to subsidize large, multinational companies from other countries. In fact, Volkswagen's revenue last year was the same as the Government of Canada's revenue, \$413 billion, so they are in desperate need of Canadian taxpayer money, clearly. That \$413 billion that we spend.... I've looked through this, and I've looked through the fall economic statement last year, which promised a balanced budget. All of these documents that are tabled with all these glossy pictures don't have any reference to \$13 billion of government spending. I think I've figured out why.

They figured out why, and I'm being asked why. Apparently the estimate.... We'll see the contracts on Monday through a parliamentary order. We had to put a parliamentary order through the industry committee in order to see the contracts, but with the parliamentary order, we'll get a look at the contracts.

● (6600)

According to the Volkswagen deal, apparently it will take five or six years to build this plant. This government, with its tendency to spend money it doesn't have, has created a new way of doing that, because the \$13 billion doesn't kick in until the year after this fiscal framework. This amount is then spread over 10 years, from 2027 onwards, I think, or 2028 onwards, to 10 years after. That is when they've assigned taxpayers to spend the money, far outside this fiscal framework.

I think the minister needs to come here and explain to us why she allowed her colleague to make a commitment that ranges to 15 years out from now, far outside the fiscal framework, and the minister of industry—

An hon. member: Two hours for 15 years...

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, two hours for 15 years...

As I said earlier, her five days of attendance have resulted in a budget that, in five years from now, will cost over half a trillion dollars. That's \$100 billion a day for her work. I still am worried that, if she shows up more, that number will go up.

She makes McKinsey look like an austerity organization. What I'd like to say in this effort to find Freeland is that, going forward, the minister needs to be accountable. Moreover, the minister of industry said that there are two or three others that maybe he's willing to do. He's not only spending the money in the fiscal framework, but he's spending it well beyond the fiscal framework.

I can't imagine that even the sanest Liberal in this government thinks they will be in government seven to 15 years from now. They are committing future governments and future taxpayers to subsidize the world's, I believe, largest car manufacturer by revenue, at \$413 billion.

Now, getting back to Mr. Blaikie's question—

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: It was a good question.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It was a good question.

The current Prime Minister's father, as we know, was prime minister off and on for 18 years—

Mr. Eric Duncan: That's far too long.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: It was far too much for Canada.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I just hope the son thinks he can do that and keeps his name on the ballot the next time. I don't think there's any chance he will, but I think he is our greatest asset.

Going forward, I would think that it would be important for people to understand how we got here financially with this budget and the national debt that's associated with it.

In 1968.... Now, in 1968 I was very young.

An hon member: No. Were you born?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, I was. I was born. I was born not too many years before that.

In 1968 we had that Trudeaumania thing that happened, apparently. I was more concerned with watching and seeing if the Leafs could win their second Stanley Cup in a row.

An hon. member: Yes, you're still waiting.

Mr. Eric Duncan: How's that working for you?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It didn't work out so well for me.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Yes, you're still waiting.

Mr. Rick Perkins: In the 1968 election, when asked about whether he would raise taxes or run a deficit, Pierre Trudeau said, the government was no Santa Claus. He said he would not run a deficit and would not increase taxes. He actually said it long before George W. Bush did, with that famous “read my lips” statement of in the 1992, I believe, presidential election against Bill Clinton. Mr. Trudeau said that Santa Claus was not what the Government of Canada is.

What happened after 1968? We had those brief nine months with the Right Honourable Joe Clark as Prime Minister. Then Pierre Trudeau came back in from 1980 to 1984. In that period the father lost the finance minister. His name was John Turner, later to be Prime Minister of Canada for a couple of months. John Turner had incredible passion and belief in the rules of order of the House of Commons.

Let me ask you a question, any representative of the riding of Vancouver Quadra, which coincidentally is currently represented by the Minister of Fisheries. She can see the ocean but no fishermen can afford to live there. It's true. Sorry, it's true.

I say this because John Turner was quite a parliamentarian and respected ministerial accountability to no end, so much so that he resigned from the Trudeau cabinet over philosophical differences. One of them was the desire to deficit spend during the era of 21% interest rates and double-digit inflation in the 1970s, which was called “stagflation”.

An hon. member: Define stagflation.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I've been asked about stagflation. For those who don't know stagflation, we are discussing the budget. It's possible we could enter into a stagflation era with this. We should really ask the Minister of Finance, in our “finding Freeland exercise”—if we could have a chance to ask her a question—if she believes that \$3.1 trillion in spending in the next five years will result in stagflation. Stagflation is when both interest rates and inflation are going up and unemployment is going up, all at the same time.

Pierre Trudeau, in 1974, ran against Robert Stanfield, one of the greatest Nova Scotians in public office we've ever had. The airport in Halifax is named after him. In 1974 Trudeau ran on a solution, which I personally don't agree with, called “wage and price controls”. The government would impose a limit on the increase in prices and wages as a way to control out-of-control spending, and the spending by the government that caused this.

Pierre Trudeau ran around the election—like a “gunslinger”, they used to call him—saying, zap! You're frozen. Zap! You're frozen. He was making fun of Robert L. Stanfield, saying he would absolutely never impose wage and price controls, because they were ridiculous.

Mr. Trudeau won a majority government in 1974, from his minority. Guess what the first thing he did in his budget was? I can hear you, but I want you to guess. He brought in wage and price controls. He actually did the opposite—surprisingly, for a Liberal Prime Minister—of what he promised in the campaign. He froze everyone's wages. He froze everyone's prices.

When he finally took those off, it led to some of the problems with the Right Honourable John Turner. When he finally took those off, of course, you know what happens with pent-up demand and pent-up wage demands. We're seeing that now as a result of COVID. We've just seen that with the public service strike. There is pent-up demand and increased demands on wages, as the increased cost of living increases the demand on wages. The giving of increased wages puts more money into the market. More money into the market chasing fewer goods creates more inflation. That's a part of stagflation that I believe we're going to get into.

● (6605)

It would be great to be able to talk to the Minister of Finance about that era and the history of her boss's father and party in creating that in the 1970s—and potentially doing it again—but to go back to Mr. Blaikie's question, that resulted in \$468 billion of national debt in 1984.

In 1984, the deficit of Pierre Trudeau, his last deficit—imagine this—was 8.9% of GDP. I don't like communicating with alphabet numbers and percentages, so based on today's gross domestic product—the value of everything we produce in Canada— if we ran a deficit of 8.9% of GDP, do you know what that deficit would be today? Just for one year, it would be \$157 billion, and that puts into perspective the legacy of Pierre Trudeau when Brian Mulroney took power. Imagine that.

I guess some were probably saying, “Well, \$157 billion, we're rather conservative as a Liberal government, then, in only producing a \$44-billion deficit this year.” They would be wrong, because it's those build-ups of deficits that created the situation we were in then and that to get out of took us 20 years.

MP Blaikie, that was the mess in 1984 when Brian Mulroney won that historic election. There were 282 seats in the House of Commons. Do you know how many seats Brian Mulroney won? The Canadian public loved Pierre Trudeau and the Liberal legacy of 18 years so much that Brian Mulroney won 211 of 282 seats. Imagine managing that caucus in government. Boy oh boy, it's tough enough for the Liberals to manage a minority caucus with the NDP in the room. To manage a caucus of 211 people in 282 seats in the House of Commons, both sides of the opposition side, one end and the other, were filled with Conservatives, with the 30- and 40-seat Liberals and NDP in the middle. I don't know if MP Blaikie's father was first elected then, but I'm pretty sure he was elected in that election.

That's the mess they inherited.

MP Blaikie asked about the Mulroney deficits. Well, the key thing in breaking the back of a deficit is to first of all break the structural deficit. We soon will have a growing structural deficit issue in this country once again. We had a massive structural deficit. Do you want to know how bad that structural deficit was? The budget for the government in 1984 was \$95 billion. Thirty-eight cents of every dollar the government collected and spent, guess what it went to...? It went to paying interest on Pierre Trudeau's debt.

Can you imagine that now? Thirty-eight per cent of every tax dollar going to pay interest: That was more than health care and defence combined. We know that defence spending was cut. The only thing that was cut under Pierre Trudeau's government was defence spending. It was cut by 50% while hundreds of new programs, initiatives and Crown corporations were created. That's the colossal mess left by the father.

• (6610)

The Chair: MP Perkins, we're going to have to suspend at this time for about 15 minutes and take a bio break, a stretch break.

Everybody go and get some air.

MP Perkins, you'll be back in about 15 minutes or so.

• (1810)

(Pause)

• (1825)

• (6625)

The Chair: Let's get it started again.

I think, MP Perkins, you were at mile four.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm curious as to the multiple screens in the offices of our Liberal colleagues if it's the Leafs game or the Prime Minister's speech at the convention that's on the other screen.... Anyway, I'll keep going on this screen.

I was addressing MP Blaikie's question about the financial record of the Mulroney government, which, as I said, was an financial disaster inherited from Pierre Trudeau: a \$468-billion national debt, an 8.9%-of-GDP annual deficit and a massive growth in the size of government, not unlike what we've now seen with 80,000 more civil servants being hired.

As I said the other day—being from a fishing riding, it's an example that's close to my heart—there is the growth in the last three years of the fisheries department by 5,000 people. That may not seem like a lot, but the department had only 10,000 to start with and now has 15,000. The HR department has doubled and now has 832 people. That's a lot of HR people. I'm being asked about how the service is, and those jobs, lest you think they actually went out to enforcement, which has been like “finding Freeland”—invisible in Atlantic Canada—have gone mostly to head office. They've hired over 1,000 people in corporate strategy and finance, because, of course, finance there apparently has much more money to spend in producing fewer results.

That aside, by the second year of the Mulroney government, his incredible finance minister, one of the nicest and most honourable people you could ever meet, who was also a groundbreaker in Canada in advocating on mental health, the Honourable Michael Wilson, in two short years turned a structural deficit into an operating surplus.

I know that people sometimes get confused about that now, because they'll say, “But he ran a deficit.” Yes, he did, because 38¢ of every dollar was going to pay interest on Pierre Trudeau's debt. The operating surplus was going to try to deal with that issue and, of course, that was made more difficult with the recession that happened in 1991. An important part of that time—I referenced it earlier—has to do with the amendment of MP Blaikie on this issue of ministerial accountability that I've been speaking of for the last little while.

I've got to tell you that one of the people with the most integrity that I've ever seen in the Liberal Party of Canada—and that's not a big search that you can do—was the Right Honourable John Turner. I met John Turner.

Let me tell you about the Right Honourable John Turner. As finance minister, he resigned from Pierre Trudeau's cabinet over the spending and other issues. More importantly, he briefly was Prime Minister of Canada. I think he was the shortest-serving one; I know that some people think it's the Right Honourable Kim Campbell, but I think it's actually John Turner.

An hon. member: Joe Clark.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, Joe Clark was Prime Minister for nine months.

John Turner was elected Liberal leader here in Ottawa at the Ottawa Civic Centre at a good old-fashioned delegate convention in June of 1984. I love those delegated conventions. That's what got me interested in politics.

The first convention I ever saw on TV as a young guy—I think I was in junior high—was the 1976 PC Conservative Party delegate convention in Ottawa, where there were 14 candidates running, including a young Joe Clark; a young Brian Mulroney; the former owner of the Edmonton Oilers, Peter Pocklington; a well-known and very respected Quebec politician, Claude Wagner; Jack Horner; Flora MacDonald; and Paul Hellyer. There is a term out of that called the “Flora Syndrome”, which, if you're interested, I can talk about at some point. That's what got me interested in politics: the excitement of watching that on TV as a young guy. Joe Clark soon became the youngest Prime Minister ever. He was 39 in 1979 when he was elected Prime Minister—imagine that...39. He was 36 when he was elected leader of the Conservative party.

• (6630)

In that 1984 convention, John Turner inherited a colossal mess...the poor bugger. It was a mess that Pierre Trudeau had left him. Pierre Trudeau famously made him sign, as part of the transition, a document appointing, surprisingly, a bunch of former ministers, bagmen and campaign workers to somewhere over 58 patronage positions—Senate seats.... Pierre Trudeau didn't have the guts to make them himself, but as part of the transition.... I don't know if it was his refusal to move out of 24 Sussex or what it was that made John Turner say, “I want to live there”. He signed this document, and John Turner signed a document appointing people like Bryce Mackasey, a minister under Trudeau, to the ambassador in Ireland, and all of those things. It was a horrible raft of patronage.

That was the beginning of the downfall. John Turner operated his Prime Minister's Office out of the Château Laurier. He never called Parliament back even though he was probably one of the people who respected Parliament the most. All the great campaign gurus, the “rainmaker” Keith Davey—some of the Liberal party members will actually know that, and if you don't, you should read his books—then senator Keith Davey, those folks all told him he didn't need to bring Parliament back. As an elected leader of the Liberal party, and now as de facto sworn in Prime Minister of Canada, he didn't need to be accountable to Parliament as Prime Minister. He just needed to go on the barbeque circuit. Everybody would love him like they loved Pierre Trudeau in 1968 but not since then.

Pierre Trudeau was smart enough to know that he couldn't defeat the newly elected leader Brian Mulroney in 1984, but John Turner lost that election. As I mentioned earlier, it was the largest victory

ever winning 211 of 282 seats. People speculated back then that the Liberal Party and the NDP would become one party. Little did they know that today that has actually happened.

Going forward, what happened to John Turner? I mentioned the Gulf War in 1991 when I talked about my boss at the time. I've had requests to mention her name. She's still alive and still kicking: the Honourable Barbara McDougall, Canada's second woman to be a foreign minister. The Gulf War was launched back then. The Internet was just coming up. We learned it on CNN..

John Turner, by this time, was still in the House of Commons representing Vancouver Quadra, but Jean Chrétien was the leader of the Liberal party. I know I'm educating the Liberals. Some of the Liberals may not know the history of their own party.

When the Gulf War happened, Jean Chrétien, as leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, famously said he had no problem with our troops being in the Middle East even though Iraq invaded the sovereign nation of Kuwait. He had no problem with our troops being over there. However, when the firing started, we would take them back and keep them out of harm's way, because you sure wouldn't want a military to actually fight.

On the night the Gulf War was launched, CNN was covering it. There was a new reporter for CNN. His name was Kent. He is a relation to our former minister Peter Kent. In fact, I think it was his brother. Arthur Kent became known as the “scud stud” as he stood in Baghdad with scud missiles flying over his head while he reported on the launch of the shock and awe campaign in the Gulf War.

John Turner, in terms of ministerial and parliamentary accountability, was an old-fashioned guy who believed that whatever our views were of our troops going to war, and whether or not we should be in it, once we were in it, we supported our troops.

There was an emergency debate in the House that night when the Gulf War broke out. Jean Chrétien was to lead it off for Her Majesty's loyal opposition and went on at great length about how the then prime minister had to remove our troops from harm in the Middle East.

• (6635)

Brian Mulroney, of course, gave an impassioned speech about supporting our allies in the coalition of the willing and about defeating totalitarianism and a leader who had killed his own people, the Kurds, with mustard gas. He said that this was just the right thing to do.

You know what? Sometimes, as a civilized and wealthy nation, that's what we have to do. It's part of our responsibility in the world.

Jean Chrétien would not allow the former prime minister and leader of the Liberal Party, John Turner, to speak in the House of Commons in that emergency debate. He wouldn't let him because he knew that John Turner, as the former leader, would get up and contradict him about what the Liberal Party should do, because John Turner would stand up and say that we have to be with our troops.

John Turner did make a speech that night in the House. For those of you who are interested in parliamentary rules and how you go about that, the deputy prime minister of the government of the day was one of the greatest Albertans ever, the Honourable—actually, later to become “Right Honourable”—Donald Mazankowski. John Turner had a chat with the former deputy prime minister for Canada, Don Mazankowski, and told him of his situation and his desire to speak.

The former deputy prime minister of Canada got up to speak in this emergency debate on the launch of the Gulf War, and about a minute into his speech said that, by the way, Mr. Speaker, I'm sharing my time with the member for Vancouver-Quadra. Jean Chrétien was sitting in the seat of the leader of the opposition. It's 11 seats down from the Speaker and is the seat that our leader and the next prime minister currently holds, only temporarily, because he'll be 11 seats down on the right side of the Speaker in the not-too-distant future.

Jean Chrétien did one of these—and I know that if you're watching you can see this—and whipped his head around, like “Holy”.... I can't say. It probably would be unparliamentary. Maybe he said, “Holy fuddle duddle.” Turner got up and did the honourable thing in Parliament as a member of Parliament, as a person with independence, a person who believed you had to be accountable to Parliament, and said that he was supporting our troops.

That was the integrity of the man. It's the integrity of the place that a former leader and former Liberal prime minister placed on the role of Parliament and the role of prime ministers, the role of MPs and the role of ministers in respecting that institution, and on when you made decisions, how you had debates and the importance of those debates.

An hon. member: And your own portfolio...

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, your own portfolio as well.

I'm shocked, quite frankly, that the Minister of Finance of today doesn't seem to have the same attitude as the former minister of finance for Pierre Trudeau in terms of the role and the accountability of the ministers to Parliament and to parliamentary committees, and I'll tell you why.

I've held up this document a couple of times. This is called “Open and Accountable Government, 2015” and was published with much fanfare by the Prime Minister—by the Privy Council Office—when this was a new, fresh-faced government. You remember those days: the “sunny ways” days.

In the sunny ways days, this document read, “Open and Accountable Government”, and for the translators, I will first go to the first page as a summary explanation of what the document says. That was the title in 2015. We all know that this is a bit of a fantasy document now given the performance—perhaps more non-fiction or fiction. It depends on your perspective. I think it's found in the science fiction/fantasy section of a bookstore now.

Here's what the first paragraph explains about the importance of this document:

Open and Accountable Government sets out core principles regarding the roles and responsibilities of Ministers in Canada's system of responsible parliamentary

government. This includes the central tenet of ministerial responsibility, both individual and collective, as well as Ministers' relations with the Prime Minister and Cabinet, their portfolios and Parliament.

• (6640)

It outlines standards. As it says here:

It outlines the standards of conduct expected of Ministers—including accountability and ethical guidelines—and addresses a range of administrative, procedural, and institutional matters.

It also provides guidance to ministerial exempt staff and useful information. It goes on. There are letters from the Prime Minister. There are introductions. It's quite robust. It has all kinds of buzz words which we like. It talks about ethics, open access, and the importance of Parliament and ministerial accountability. There's fundraising and dealing with lobbyists. I don't think members read that section that much, or *Pomp & Circumstance* may not have got the untendered contracts which they got. This document set out lofty goals. It's the type of document which was referred to in my earlier remarks. I would encourage all of our people looking at this to read it.

Before I go to reading the mandate letter of the Minister of Finance, and I know everyone is riveted and probably curious as to what it said, Mr. Chair, I would like to move to adjourn.

• (6645)

The Chair: Is there any further discussion, as I still have a list here?

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: I heard a no.

MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Is a motion to adjourn debatable? Do you not have to have a vote?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It's not debatable, but it is something we can vote on.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, please poll the members.

(Motion negated: nays 9; yeas 2)

The Chair: We will continue.

MP Perkins, did you vote against yourself?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I did. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll explain why. I didn't have a chance to.

The Chair: Well, you have about six hours to do that.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. I won't take all six on the reason why.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rick Perkins: But I will share the reason why.

The other day—and I have been known to heckle a couple of times in the House. The other day—I think it was yesterday—on one of the government's answers there was massive applause by all opposition parties, including, I believe, the Green Party. After one of the questions the minister gave an answer. I won't name the minister, but I heckled, "I don't think you've read the room." I know it's hard to read the room when so many are on video, but I just wanted to make sure that everyone—and I appreciate the vote of confidence that you're all interested in what I'm saying, so I will continue. I appreciate that.

In "Open and Accountable Government, 2015", on page 1 after the Roman numerals, the title is "Ministerial Responsibility and Accountability".

I'm sure the translators have that. I would like to just read so the people watching can understand what this government committed to in terms of ministerial responsibility and accountability. It's what they committed to, but as with this government, there are a lot of inputs and very little output. This is another example.

In our search called "finding Freeland" we turned to this document. The first paragraph reads,

Ministers of the Crown are chosen by the Prime Minister and along with him constitute the Ministry. They all serve at the pleasure of the Prime Minister. Government policy is established by the Cabinet. The Ministry together helps carry out the mandate of the government.

Ministers of the Crown

—as the ministers are known, by that formal term—
are responsible and accountable to the Prime Minister and

—this is a crucial "and"—

Parliament in two fundamental ways:

An hon. member: Really? How?

Mr. Rick Perkins: This is a document of Prime Minister Trudeau's.

An hon. member: Which one?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's the current one. I'm sorry.

I was asked which one. I have referenced the father. I'm referring to the document on the newly elected son.

As I said:

Ministers of the Crown are responsible and accountable to the Prime Minister and Parliament in two fundamental ways:

—number one—

individually, for their performance in carrying out the responsibilities of the portfolio assigned to them by the Prime Minister;

Let me make a brief comment on that. In this cabinet, as you spend more money and seem to blow by the budgets you were given.... Under normal circumstances, you might be fired. Certainly, in my private sector career, if someone spent more than they were allocated, they were fired. Apparently, that's not what happens in this government. What happens in this government is that you get promoted. You get promoted to be Finance Minister.

Well, the Finance Minister, I guess, continues to succeed in this role because of that factor. In the "finding Freeland" effort, I find

all these references to commitments to balance budgets. The first one after this was that we would balance it in 2019. Then we would have a debt-to-GDP ratio as opposed to balanced budgets. Then we would have another guardrail and, in the fall of 2022, in the economic statement....

Just so those watching know, you can get copies of this. I'm sure you can still order them from Parliament. I'm not sure that they sold out. I think they have surplus of these. It would be a shame if these all had to go into the recycle bin. I would encourage people to read this, because it has quite a statement by the current Minister of Finance. She said she would balance the budget within the fiscal framework.

An hon. member: Did she?

Mr. Rick Perkins: She did. She did. It's surprising.

What was the date of that again? I should open that up and just see the date. I don't recall, but I know we have some good minds around this table.

What was the date of that economic statement?

Oh, the letter isn't dated. But it was last fall. That's why it's called the fall economic statement.

As I recall, that would have been in the fall, so, say, eight months ago or seven months ago.

An hon. member: That's a bit generous to the government.

• (6650)

It said that we would have a balanced budget. I'm speaking to this first point here on the accountability to the Prime Minister and Parliament individually for their performance. I'd like to see the performance review targets that were set out by the Prime Minister, as a good boss would do for their ministers.

I know that it's probably in the document here on the minister's mandate letter, which I will get to, but the performance in carrying out her duties.... Apparently, and I could not find this in the mandate letter, and I'll show you where later and why I'm puzzled by this—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: On a point of order, Chair, the fall economic statement was tabled on November 3, 2022.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Did I hear another point of order?

The Chair: You're at mile five, MP Perkins. You can continue. Take a bit of water and continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you. I appreciate that.

On that second point, still on page 1 of “Ministerial Responsibility and Accountability” in the document of this new government, it states “individually, for their performance in carrying out the responsibilities”. I looked to find in this mandate letter a target for the Minister of Finance that says one of the things that we wish for you to do is to present fiscal outlooks and projections for the Government of Canada and for taxpayers that are wrong, that you will actually blow by and not deliver on. I didn't see that as part of the mandate.

I'll come back to that, but it's funny: Maybe there is a separate set of performance measures an employer sets out for an employee that says that somewhere, but it's not in the public document. We know that not all documents the government has are public. Some are secret until they're leaked to *The Globe and Mail*. Maybe on this request, if any of our media colleagues out there, who you know we love and adore, are interested, you might put in an access to information request to see if there are other performance metrics for the “finding Freeland” problem on her targets. We can't seem to find Freeland or her targets.

The second point here is “collectively, in support of the Ministry team and [decision-making] Cabinet”, because of course cabinet is a team sport. It's clear from the way ministers perform in question period that they all say the same lines. They clearly have the same coach and same team, because the lines never seem to change. They probably pass and get good marks on their performance appraisals from the boss for sticking to the paper lines on how to respond to questions, even if the lines have nothing to do with the question.

Page 1 goes on to say—and for the sake of the translators, this is after those two bullet points—that “Ministers' individual and collective responsibility is an essential principle guiding the role of Cabinet government in Canada, and is at the core of the standards for ministerial behaviour.” There is a footnote here, footnote 1 at the bottom of the page, with details, I guess, on the standards for ministerial behaviour, that “may be found in *Responsibility in the Constitution*, Privy Council Office, 1993.”

I'm not sure what that means because I don't think the Constitution has anything about behaviour. It's a strange footnote in a government document. Maybe that's why ministers are confused. They read the footnotes and couldn't make a connection between ethics, responsibility and the constitutional footnotes here.

Section 1.1 on “Individual Ministerial Responsibility” says, “Ministers are accountable to the Prime Minister”. That's pretty much a foregone conclusion if you did grade 10 civics class. They don't put in here that ministers, as MPs, also are accountable to the people who elected them. That's something that's at the core of what we as Conservatives believe. It goes on to say, “Ministers are accountable to the Prime Minister: they are appointed by the Governor General”.

Under this government, we've had a series of Governors General on that advice and, apparently, if you're not a Governor General anymore, the Prime Minister has employment for you in investigating their scandals. Maybe we need more former governors general, because there's a lot of work to do there.

This says: “on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister may ask for their resignation at any time.” He only asks, as we've said, for resignations when they disagree with his own particular view on interference in the courts.

The next paragraph says, “Ministers are also accountable to Parliament.” Oh, it does say that. That's good. It continues:

Most ministerial responsibilities are conferred on Ministers by Parliament through statutes that set out the powers, duties and functions for which the Minister is individually accountable.

I think that's an important thing. It's on page 1, and if it weren't important in a large document like this, it wouldn't be on page 1. Again, page 1 says, “Ministers are...accountable to Parliament”, and that's what we're talking about here, as to whether or not this minister is accountable to Parliament in five days and five months of attendance in Parliament and three rejections of the invitation of this committee to appear before it. We are now trying once again to get her before the committee on a \$490-billion budget that spends \$3.1 trillion over the next five years.

• (6655)

By the way—did I say this before?—that's if they don't spend anything new on top of what they're already planning to.

At the top of page 2, these very high, lofty standards, which the “sunny way” government set out in 2015, say:

In addition, Ministers may also have other [duties] in common law. They may also have responsibilities assigned to them by the Prime Minister. Ministers are accountable to Parliament for all areas of responsibility, whether they are assigned by statute or otherwise.

It also states that “Ministers are accountable to Parliament”. Wow, there's a concept. It comes from this Westminster parliamentary system. I know MP Blaikie and others are very interested in this document and the study by Dr. Brenton I mentioned and went through earlier.

For those who missed it, I could go through it again, but I'll finish going through this, right now.

“Accountable to Parliament” is a fundamental tenet of the Westminster system. It's what differentiates us from a republican system, where ministers in the United States government are actually not elected. They're just appointed by the president and have no dual responsibility of accountability to Congress because they're not a congressman or a senator. They don't have that dual responsibility we do in Canada. I think our system is far superior because of that accountability.

On page 2 of this lofty document, section 1.2 is titled, “Collective Ministerial Responsibility”.

I know I'm lucky enough to be joined here tonight by our whip, MP Findlay.

I will give you applause.

Our whip is honourable. I know that, as a mere member of Parliament, I'm often referred to by constituents as "honourable". I try to be honourable, but that's a title that comes with being a privy councillor. MP Findlay is a privy councillor, having served in the cabinet of the second-best, third-best or best—whatever your perspective is, but certainly in the top two, in my mind—prime minister in Canada, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. She was part of that and has a lot of experience she could share with us about ministerial accountability and appearance before committees, and the respect with which she treated parliamentary committees, as did all Harper ministers—always attending the committee when asked to do so, in order to be held to account for their actions as a minister of the Crown.

Section 1.2, "Collective Ministerial Responsibility", states:

All members of the Ministry are collectively responsible for carrying out the government's policies as established by the Cabinet. They are therefore expected to work in close consultation with their ministerial colleagues. This principle is the foundation of a key constitutional convention known as Cabinet solidarity.

I guess "cabinet solidarity" means all cabinet ministers—indeed, all members of Parliament on the government side, principally, because, I believe, they're going to vote for this. They believe spending \$3.1 trillion without the revenue to cover it, and adding \$130 billion to our debt, is actually good for our economy. I don't see how spending that money....

It's sort of like President Biden's misnamed "Inflationary Act". I call it the "Inflationary Act" because, when you spend the trillions of dollars President Biden is on subsidizing things the private sector will already do—that markets will drive you to—that's adding more cash into the economy. More cash in the economy creates more spending, and more spending for fewer goods creates inflation. It's an oxymoron to call it the "Inflation Reduction Act". It's the "Inflationary Act". It's something the minister of industry is now keen on emulating.

The second paragraph of section 1.2 says:

Policies presented to Parliament and to the public must be the agreed policies of the Cabinet.

In other words, you can't be a freelancer. You have to support this stuff.

● (6700)

Moreover, "Ministers...cannot dissociate themselves from or repudiate the decisions of Cabinet or their Ministry colleagues unless they resign from the Ministry"—as John Turner did from Pierre Trudeau's and as did, I must admit, Jody Wilson-Raybould. We can't forget Jody Wilson-Raybould, who followed that convention to a T. As the good lawyer that she is, she respects that. She's a random Liberal, too, like "Bill no more".

The third paragraph here says:

Cabinet solidarity is further reinforced by the Privy Councillor's oath requiring Ministers...to declare their opinion as decisions are being made, and to strictly uphold the confidentiality of Cabinet decision making.

That prompts me to think, did anyone in the cabinet object to breaking their 2015, 2019 and fall economic statement commitments to Canadians, through Parliament, to balance the budget? Did anyone object, or did they just look at it and say, "Wow, more

money for me to spend. Won't that be fun?" I think it was more the latter than the former.

You know, when you stand up in this cabinet to the prevailing view that more spending equals re-election, somehow you end up back in the private sector as did "Bill no more", Jody Wilson-Raybould or Jane Philpott. Thankfully, one of the benefits of Jane Philpott being back in the private sector is that we have a doctor shortage in Canada, and I'm so glad she's back practising medicine and helping her community. That's probably one of the few Liberals adding value to our country.

Furthermore, it says:

The Cabinet decision-making process is a key mechanism for achieving overall coherence and coordination in government policy. Ministerial responsibilities may overlap or have implications for other Ministers.

That happens when you have two ministers doing the same job. I think we have a bit of a cabinet of Noah's ark where two people do the same thing.

In fact, if you look at the cabinet committee list to accountable Parliament, there are two environment committees. They are creatively named as environment cabinet committee "A" and environment cabinet committee "B". For the life of me, I've looked at their mandates. They're publicly available. Their mandates seem to be identical. It's no wonder deliverology has disappeared from this government. It's more in terms of inputs—heck, let's have two environment committees because one was so effective.

It continues:

The increasing complexity of issues means that policies and programs must be reviewed in relation to each other.

Governments often make these mistakes. They overthink things and make things more complicated than they are. They do things like have two cabinet committees on the same subject.

It adds:

Ministers also have responsibilities for representing the different perspectives and interests of their regions, and these inevitably cut across departments.

Those are fine words.

Then it says:

Ministers need to work closely together to ensure...their individual proposals...[and consideration] in the broader objectives of the government's agenda.

Section I.3 sort of gets down to the heart of the matter. It's on page 2, so it is almost as important as page 1. Page 2 says, "Ministers are accountable to Parliament". Wow, there's that term again. Then it adds:

Ministers are accountable to Parliament for the exercise of powers, duties and functions vested in them by statute or otherwise. Ministers must be present in Parliament to respond to questions on the discharge of their responsibilities, including the manner in which public monies were spent, as well as to account for that use.

Do you know where that paragraph comes from, colleagues? That paragraph comes from the 2011 Stephen Harper accountability for ministers document that I read earlier. I guess they aspired to have the same accountability to Parliament, but they clearly have a different definition of it.

I think we should call this the “Michael Ignatieff ministerial accountability section”, affectionately of course. He was always reprimanded by the NDP for not showing up in Parliament and for having the worst attendance record. To receive a paycheque from the taxpayer, you should actually be in Parliament.

It could be the “Michael Ignatieff and finding Freeland accountability section”. Apparently, now, the interpretation of this code is once a month. That's all one needs to do. Somebody should tell the public safety minister that he only needs to show up once a month. It would make all our lives easier.

• (6705)

We know that it's basically, in terms of Parliament, one hour plus 15 minutes a week for the Prime Minister, but that sets the standard again. It used to be that prime ministers came to question period every day of the week. Can you believe that? They were always available in question period to answer, especially, respectfully.... The reason they were there was because the leaders of the other parties in Parliament...the Prime Minister would always be there to answer those questions every day—not just one day a week and then fly to Jamaica or New York, or wherever he's surfing or vacationing, be it Tofino or that kind of thing.

Ministerial Ignatieff accountability apparently means one day a month.

Parliament to respond to questions on the discharge.... That's an interesting statement. It says “respond to questions”.

That's what we're asking for in this motion. We're asking for the minister to come to committee for two hours. Two hours may seem like a lot. Ministers are very busy. It's hard to find time in their schedules, and I respect that. Having worked seven years for a minister, I know how difficult it is.

Here's the thing, though. Tomorrow—actually, it's tonight, in 50 minutes or so—the Liberal Party convention here in Ottawa starts and the Prime Minister is speaking there tonight. I'm sure the Minister of Finance is there. Over the weekend—

An hon. member: She could have dropped in here first.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes. We've been here. She could have come. I've been able to show up here for over three hours straight now—

An hon. member: It's been more than three hours—

An hon. member: It feels a lot longer than that.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —and I was hoping the minister would come.

It feels longer than that for some, I'm sure.

I know the Minister of Finance is at the convention, as are some of the Liberal colleagues, because the Minister of Finance—

An hon. member: She could come over after.

An hon. member: Yes. We'll be around.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I know two hours is precious in her time. It's so precious that she has allocated two hours of her time to doing panels at the Liberal convention. Yes, I know you're shocked to know that. She's doing a panel, apparently, on election readiness and election success, as I've mentioned before, with the former Democrat candidate for president, Hillary Clinton, who is still former. She didn't make it either.

I'm sure there are a lot of lessons learned, because, you know, there's that saying, “We learn a lot from our mistakes.” I'm sure Hillary has a lot of mistakes to share with the Liberals to avoid in the future, or perhaps personal discussions with the Minister of Finance. As we search for “finding Freeland”, Chrystia Freeland and Hillary Clinton, I'm sure, will have a private tête-à-tête on some of these things.

An hon. member: We could invite them both.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We could invite them both. I've never met the former first lady. It would be an interesting discussion.

Believe it or not, the second hour.... One hour is, I think, what the minister might perhaps sometime be willing to do, maybe before or after the amendments happen. It is the Minister of Finance's budget bill we're discussing, but she has a second hour at the convention, and I'm sure all my Liberal friends will be there with rapt attention to hear her presentation on the budget bill and how she is spending it.

I'm told, surprisingly, her presentation to the Liberal convention will not be on whether or not she comes to this committee. It will not be on whether or not her budget of \$130 billion of more debt to our national debt will be there. It will not be about the sad legacy of the Trudeau family in contributing \$1.1 trillion to Canada's debt. Unfortunately, that's not the title of the thing. The session, apparently, is every sort of mixed bag acronym thing that you can put in about how we succeed in the future world of innovation, green economy and every other sort of woke title.

I'm sure it will be fascinating. I think it's going to take 10 minutes just to read the title of that session, so be prepared.

• (6710)

If you go to that session as a Liberal member of Parliament, because I'm sure there will be some there, could you ask some of our questions for us? I would really appreciate it. I know we get some observers there, but I don't believe they will allow us at the microphones at that session.

Could they ask the Minister of Finance, would they please ask the Minister of Finance, if she could spare a dime...no, sorry, spare two hours for poor parliamentarians to defend her \$490-billion budget this year? Could she spare a little time for us? Now, if you're not willing to ask that, then perhaps you could ask her about this budget—about how all of this spending, putting future generations into debt, works.

By the way, if the Minister of Industry is there.... I did run into him in the hall earlier today. As I've said, he's an effervescent fellow—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*] hospitality suite.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, maybe it's true. I suspect that the minister has a hospitality suite tonight. I don't know why he would be doing that. Perhaps my Liberal friends could share with me why he would be hosting a hospitality suite. He is a hospitable fellow.

In that hospitality suite...or perhaps the Minister of Industry could ask the Minister of Finance at the session why she thinks it is good fiscal management planning to commit \$13 billion of taxpayer money outside of this fiscal framework beyond the life of this government. How is that responsible? I'd like him to ask that, perhaps. Everybody wants to know.

You know, the minister likes to talk in business language. I'm talking about the Minister of Finance but also the Minister of Industry. One of the languages of budgets and ministers of finance and ministers of industry is “return on investment”. It's an important thing, ROI.

The Minister of Industry, speaking of accountability to Parliament, has stood in the House with regard to this Volkswagen deal.

I know that Andrew Coyne is listening: Listen carefully, because you seem to have missed the questions I asked in the House on Volkswagen.

I'll ask either of these ministers, if I get a chance, why the Minister of Industry stood in the House and said that the ROI on the Volkswagen \$14-billion deal is a payback in five years, and I'll tell you why. He said every banker in Canada—probably not the ones in Silicon Valley, but every banker in Canada—would love to have a return on investment in five years.

To be fair to the Minister of Industry, he did show up to the industry committee last week.

An hon. member: Well, that's something.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He showed up for two hours.

An hon. member: So it can be done.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Shockingly, it can be done. It wasn't even on very much notice.

After questions on this report that he claimed to have been done on an ROI that justified this commitment beyond the fiscal framework, the Minister of Industry referred to a publicly available document, which I had had, written by a policy “think tank”, we'll call it, in Ontario about the theoretical value some decade twenty to thirty years from now of the value of an entire theoretical ecosys-

tem supply chain for EV cars. It wasn't about this deal, as he had led the House to believe. There is no ROI document on this deal with Volkswagen. There is just a theoretical think tank publication on something that says, well, you know, if the stars align, and the fairy dust does this, and the clouds do that, and the earth moves in a certain way, and the government puts in enormous amounts of money that it can't afford in both Ottawa and Ontario, and all that subsidy happens, and we convince all the carmakers to come and create all their stuff here, there might be a 300,000-job impact in Ontario. It sounds impressive. And on the 3,000, somehow the minister created some of that Bill Morneau-Chrystia Freeland math in saying that it somehow translates into 3,000 jobs in this plant in an unknown contract and an unknown ROI.

• (6715)

This mythical report that the minister referred to and led Parliament to believe was done for this deal does not exist.

Let me read again from the ministerial accountability document on open and transparent government that the government put out in its early days, just to remind people of the context of what we're seeking here:

Ministers are responsible to Parliament for the exercise of the powers, duties and functions vested in them.... Ministers must be present in Parliament to respond to questions of the discharge of their responsibilities.

We referred earlier to documents, in this fine report of honest and open government and integrity in answers and truthfulness in answers. Personally, far be it from me to make a claim about the Minister of Industry, but he did say there was a report in the House, on the ROI of this deal, and, by the minister's own admission before a parliamentary committee, that does not exist.

We asked him to table that report. He basically said “It doesn't exist. You can get the public document.” That's all he has, so we're going to be very curious to see the contract on Monday. The minister claims 3,000 direct jobs. I can tell you that in a personal conversation I had with the minister he confirmed to me, when I asked him how many people, the day the plant opens, will be in that plant working, those who punch a timecard, those who are working on any assembly lines there, those who work in management full-time at that plant. I said, “Is it 3,000? Is it less than 3,000?” He said “At the plant? Well, yes, less than 3,000.” He said, “It's complicated. You know, it's in the contract and it's very complicated.” I said, “Okay, is it less than 2,000?”

This was outside the washroom. Be careful what you say to people outside the washroom in the House of Commons. He said, “Well, no, it's not less than 2,000.” I said, “Is it less than 1,000 jobs at the plant?” Do you know what the Minister of Industry said? “Yes, it's less than 1,000.”

Question period was starting, and I really had to use the facilities, so I could not ask him if it was less than 500. I could not ask him if it was less than 200. Volkswagen is the most automated car manufacturer in the world. It's hard to believe, no matter how many football fields he claims this thing to be, that there is nothing in there but automation, which taxpayers are paying for, and very few direct jobs. Do you know what? Construction jobs are great. My brother works in construction. I'm sure he'd appreciate one of those fine temporary jobs building this plant, and if the minister wants to let me know, I'm sure my brother could give him a good deal on the construction.

The issue is that those jobs go away when the plant is done. They are not permanent jobs created by a \$14-billion investment, so I am hoping that some day we will see a government, in the not-too-distant future, that actually gives answers to the questions when asked and doesn't sort of sprinkle fairy dust around and sort of make it up as they go along. However, because he's a likeable fellow, which he is, we all accept that as a given.

It's our duty, as the official opposition—and it will soon be his duty as the official opposition—to question us when we're in government, and I can assure you that we will be giving better questions and answers to the questions that—

• (6720)

Mr. Eric Duncan: On a point of order, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry to interrupt there, but I don't think it would be possible for you or the clerk to intervene during Mr. Perkins' comments here. As the meeting continues to go on this evening here, I'm just wondering if you or the clerk could update us. During Mr. Perkins' comments here, have we received any correspondence from the finance minister or her office confirming whether she would be attending the finance committee?

If we had that correspondence or confirmation since the meeting started, that might help facilitate some of the conversation—

The Chair: That's not a point of order, but it is part of the motion.

MP Perkins, you can continue.

Is it on a point of order?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: On a point of order, I just noted that according to the agenda for the Liberal convention, Ms. Freeland is wrapping up right now. I'm wondering if we would like to reach out and maybe get her since Zoom is an option, I believe.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

MP Lawrence, that's not a point of order.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: The entire Liberal—even the rest of the members won't show up to this committee, including the chair, so I don't know how we're ever going to get the minister ever. No Liberal will show up to the committee.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Hey. I'm here.

• (6725)

The Chair: MP Lawrence, have some decorum, please, and respect.... All comments are to be made through the chair, MP Lawrence.

No, MP Lawrence, you do not have the floor.

We'll go back to MP Perkins. I think you're at mile six now.

MP Perkins, you can continue.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

If we end this discussion—although I must say I'm very interested—it would be great if we could pass the motion. We could probably move on and invite the deputy—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, that's not a point of order.

The Chair: It is part of the motion, so it would be with the amendment that MP Blaikie has brought forward.

I don't know if members would like to go to it.

Is that what you're asking for?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Was my point of order not valid?

The Chair: I didn't hear a point of order. Who is that from?

Mr. Eric Duncan: It's Mr. Duncan again.

If that point of order was part of it.... I'm just asking about correspondence. We haven't had any. If we haven't had a response—

The Chair: I did not see.

We're going back to MP Perkins.

Mr. Eric Duncan: There's no correspondence.

The Chair: You may continue, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. I really do.

For the translators, I'm on page 3 of the document that I have been citing.

I think that as a parliamentarian I'm entitled to actually express the reasons why I would support the motion calling for the minister to be here, and I think it's incumbent upon the minister, perhaps, to read or to listen to some of this testimony. Maybe I will be able to change her mind and have her show up this time.

Page 3 states:

It is critical to the principle of responsible government that all organizations within the executive be the responsibility of a Minister who is accountable to Parliament for the organization. A Minister is accountable to Parliament for the proper functioning of his or her department and all other organizations within his or her portfolio.

Those are fine words. This continues in the next paragraph:

Ministers fulfill their accountability with respect to organizations by demonstrating appropriate diligence and competence in the discharge of their responsibilities.

It's hard to disagree with that, although we could question some of the performances. It goes on to say:

What constitutes appropriate ministerial oversight will depend on the nature of the organization and the Minister's role. In some cases, where arm's-length bodies are concerned and most powers, duties and functions are vested in a deputy head or a [government] body, the Minister's engagement will be at a systemic level—for example, making or recommending appropriate appointments, approving corporate plans, or examining the need for changes to the framework [of] legislation.

The final paragraph in this section—I believe it's in the section before we go to section 2, which is called “Portfolio Responsibilities”—says, on page 3:

Ministerial accountability to Parliament does not mean that a Minister is presumed to have knowledge of every matter that occurs within his or her department portfolio—

We certainly see that demonstrated most days in the House.

—nor that the Minister is necessarily required to accept personal responsibility [on] every matter.

That's a statement in here that this government excels at. It does require that ministers attend to all matters in Parliament. Let me read that again:

It does require that the Minister attend to all matters in Parliament that concern any organizations for which he or she is responsible, including responding to questions. It further requires that the Minister take appropriate corrective action to address any problems that may have arisen, consistent with the Minister's role with respect to the organization in question. It is important that Ministers know and respect the parameters of their responsibilities with respect to arm's-length organizations.

I think the key sentence here is that it does “require that the minister attend to all matters in Parliament that concern any organizations for which he or she is responsible, including responding to questions”. Isn't that at the heart of the matter of this discussion? The heart of this matter is that we have a simple ask on a complex bill. The simple ask on this is that the minister come and answer questions, as is part of our parliamentary Westminster system—to answer questions about this complex bill that sets out a framework to spend \$3.1 trillion.

For those of you who were here earlier, I'm going to speak a little more to the ministerial responsibility. This is in “Open and Accountable Government”. I might come back to it at some point, but for now, for those watching who don't understand this, when cabinet is sworn in, they get a mandate letter from the Prime Minister. It tells them what priorities the Prime Minister, as head of government, wants them to focus on.

I have here in my hand two mandate letters, both dated December 16, 2021. They're both the most recent ones for cabinet, and I'll read part of the first one.

• (6730)

This is Minister Freeland's mandate letter. The Prime Minister quite likely thanks her for continuing to serve Canadians as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. It's quite an honour for anyone to have that role. It is an honour and deserves respect. We have respect for the minister in her role; it's just a question of whether she respects parliamentarians in their roles in this committee.

It goes through some boilerplate stuff—because this was still in the midst of COVID—about the COVID issues.

People can find these online. They're available. They can Google-search them.

I go to the second page—that's for the translators. I want to look specifically at the paragraph at the bottom of the second page and the instructions from the Prime Minister of Canada, the son of Pierre Trudeau. I'd like to see what instructions he gave her in this particular mandate letter. It's very important. This is what guides them. This is how you would conduct a performance review in the private sector: “This is the mandate. These are the things we'd like you to achieve. When I decide whether you've been successful or not, we will look back at these goals and see how you've done.”

The “finding Freeland” effort, I'll remind you, is...five days in Parliament in five months, once a day.

Here's what the Prime Minister wrote and signed himself, personally:

The success of this Parliament will require Parliamentarians, both in the House of Commons and the Senate, to work together across all parties to get big things done for Canadians.

I wouldn't expect a minister to get little things done, just the big things. Apparently, the little things, like getting a passport, don't enter into the mandate of a minister.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rick Perkins: Little things, like processing an immigration application while 2.4 million people wait on those, are the things we're not supposed to be focused on. We're supposed to be getting to the “big things”. I'm sorry. There was a saying, once: “Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds”. Maybe I have a little mind, because I'm reading into this and they're only focused on big things for Canadians. Perhaps that explains why the search for DFO enforcement in my riding, since the beginning of March, has been as successful as the search for Freeland. It's just as elusive.

This paragraph—for the translators—goes on to say this in the second sentence. The first sentence certainly has lots to chew on. The second sentence is, “I expect you to maintain constructive relationships with your Opposition Critics”.

Some hon. members: Wow.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Just so people get that again.... I know some of the other members who are legitimately, as the rules allow, Zooming into the committee meeting may have a convention or a hockey game on in the background.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rick Perkins: Let me repeat what that sentence says:

I expect you to maintain constructive relationships with your Opposition Critics and coordinate any legislation with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I can tell you, I think I have a fairly constructive relationship with the Minister of Industry. In my year as fisheries critic, I wouldn't say the Minister of Industry listened to me on anything. In fact, in my first meeting with the Minister of Fisheries, as critic, when I started to brief her on the issue we were facing in the elver fishery....

An hon. member: She wasn't sure what the fish were.

An hon. member: An "eel-legal" fishery.

Mr. Rick Perkins: For all those who have just joined us and didn't see my presentation at the previous meeting, an elver is a baby eel. They're not as cute as seals but worth a lot more: \$5,000 a kilogram. They're caught live, shipped to Asia, grown into full eels and eaten.

At my first meeting with the minister, I said, "You have a problem with the elver fishery." All the big to-dos in the fisheries department were there—the deputy minister and all the ADMs. They were so afraid of little old me that they flew the director general of Nova Scotia in all the way to Ottawa for this meeting. It was little old me and my legislative assistant then, a fine young fellow named Matthew Clark, who was 23 years old. Matthew Clark and I, apparently, intimidated the fisheries department before we'd even had a meeting with them. Maybe that's because I defeated the fisheries minister. That might have had something to do with it.

I raised elvers with her. Do you know what the minister said to me? The Minister of Fisheries of Canada said to me, "What's an elver?"

• (6735)

An hon member: I knew it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I turned to the deputy minister, a fellow named Timothy Sargent, who got turfed out one day late last year by the PMO as deputy minister. He's gone off on a "special assignment".

I explained to her about this eel-legal fishery that's going on—

An hon. member: There you go. Hear, hear!

Mr. Rick Perkins: On this eel-legal fishery, I said, "An elver is a baby eel."

The department asked me to actually explain this to the minister—the officials. I'm not sure what all the paycheques and bonuses they're getting paid are for, when little old me had to explain to the fisheries minister what an elver was, but I did. That's part of this issue of good relationships in this ministerial accountability letter with the opposition critics.

I tried. I said, "Look, I'm not going to raise this in Parliament. I'm going to give you a chance to fix it." That's the way I operate. There's the stuff that we have to do in Parliament, but this one is so important. "Please, Minister, will you look at this? Will you look into this? We have poachers from all over the place. In fact, I wish you could see this."

I had a text today that came from Digby County, from the fishing community, with a picture of a truck arriving from the United

States. Digby County is in Nova Scotia, in the riding of West Nova. Digby scallops are the best scallops in the world, by the way.

The picture that was sent to me was from one of the big spokespeople for a big fishing alliance. He sent me this picture. I'm sure you can't see it. I don't know whether I should block this out, but there is a licence plate number of a Maine truck that has just arrived in Digby County.

Do you know where he's located? He's located at the local hardware store. Why would a truck from Maine be at a hardware store in Digby, Nova Scotia? I'm sure everybody was asking that.

They were going in to buy nets, to buy anchors for those nets and to buy bubblers. What's a bubbler for? You put a bubbler in the water, like with a fish tank. They keep oxygen going, because all fish need oxygen. This fellow, whom we know and have reported many times to DFO, has been illegally poaching elvers at \$5,000 a kilogram, and he is still here, from the United States, and doing it, unabandoned.

In this search for Freeland...I think five days in the House of Commons a month is actually more frequent than DFO enforcement showing up at the rivers with thousands of poachers.

The minister said to me, "I don't know what an elver is," so I explained it to her. I gave her the chance. For months, I waited. It was like *Waiting for Godot*. You know that old movie. I waited. Please. I'm hoping the minister was earnest.

In her mandate letter... Let me be sure. So that you know and everybody watching knows, this requirement in the Minister of Finance's mandate letter from the Prime Minister is that they maintain "constructive relationships" with their critic.

Guess what? When I looked at the Minister of Fisheries's mandate letter, it has a similar paragraph. In fact, if I turn it over and don't see who it's addressed to, it's identical. The final page, page 2, says this says this to the Minister of Fisheries. This will sound familiar, because I just read it in the other one:

The success of this Parliament will require Parliamentarians—

• (6740)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Chatel.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

This is an absolutely fascinating story.

[*English*]

The Chair: Clerk, I am not getting interpretation. Wait one second.

Go ahead, MP Chatel, again.

I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I just wanted to say how fascinating I find all these stories. Perhaps we should invite the honourable member to the national Liberal convention, and if he's inclined to attend, we could listen to him regale us with his incredible stories over a drink.

This is the Standing Committee on Finance, however, and we are supposed to be discussing the motion. Fisheries is a very interesting topic, but this isn't the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I just wanted to point that out.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: On that point of order, I have a response to that, Mr. Chair, if I could respond.

The Chair: This is MP who?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It's MP Lawrence.

"It's MP who?" MP Perkins has taken over this committee—

The Chair: On that point of order....

Mr. Philip Lawrence: —so that's a fair point.

The Chair: Just one second, MP Lawrence.

Just to bring everyone back to focus again, we are now debating the amendment to the motion of MP Blaikie. I'll read it again:

That the Minister of Finance be invited to be here for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18, 2023.

I think the last we left off with MP Perkins, he was at about mile seven of this marathon.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm sorry. I just wanted to respond to that point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: The member rightfully brought up the Liberal convention, which is going on right now. I'd like to congratulate Terry Beech as well as Sophie Chatel for speaking. I don't know what was wrong with Yvan and Heath, or Peter, but I'm sure missing the Prime Minister's talk won't....

I'm sure you'll get cabinet eventually.

The Chair: I'm delighted you're so interested in the Liberal convention. You should all be there, joining in on all the fun.

I feel there's an in-the-closet Liberal in MP Perkins, with all he knows about the convention.

Go ahead, MP Perkins. You may continue....

There's a point of order from MP Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in response to that last point of order by MP Lawrence, I think I should get into cabinet just for listening to MP Perkins for the last few hours.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Good one, MP Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Let it be known that the Conservatives agree.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You know, I don't know if that—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, I think it may be a vast improvement over some of the folks who are there now. I appreciate that. I would really, really love to have my colleague MP Chatel in there as well. Perhaps a glass of wine at the Shaw Centre would be fine.

The Chair: MP Perkins, we're all listening. I'm not sure if those were compliments or not, but you may continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate the question about how this relates to the amendment posed by MP Blaikie, which is about ministerial accountability. That's really what we're talking about here.

I think it is pertinent, when you talk about ministerial accountability, to talk about the mandate letter of accountability that the Prime Minister gave the ministers upon their being sworn into cabinet.

I read only the first two lines of the Minister of Finance's, but I think I understand the question about how the Minister of Fisheries relates to this, and it's a fair question. The fair question is that the minister, as well as others, has the same accountability—just to make sure we understand how she works—because Minister Free-land's letter says she must work closely with her opposition critics.

In fact, it says, "I expect you to maintain constructive relationships with your Opposition Critics...." That does, I think, mean having conversations with them. Minister Champagne is a very talkative fellow. I generally talk to him almost every day. He reaches out—he's a fine fellow—but with Minister Murray, in my role as critic—her letter says the same thing. It says, "I expect you to maintain constructive relationships with your Opposition Critics."

In that spirit, I asked her if she would consider solving this problem, because where growing lawlessness happens, you have a problem of accountability, which is what this is all about. Without accountability, without the law being followed, you have anarchy.

I gave the minister her chances to do that. I gave her months and months and months and months and, ultimately, after I wrote letters and made inquiries and tried to do it in as collegial a way possible—as the Prime Minister's letter says we should all do—she said no, and the result of that, of course, is growing and growing lawlessness and poaching throughout this.

It's gotten really sad and difficult for people who work in the fishing community, who can no longer earn a living while others, who are essentially committing crimes under the law, are allowed to get away with it.

I got a letter today—actually it's dated yesterday, May 2—from a constituent of mine who lives just outside of the largest town in my riding. The largest town in my riding is Bridgewater, but she lives outside of it, and she writes:

“Dear MP Rick Perkins, I am writing to express my grave concern regarding the recent past and present state of the elver fishery in my local area.”

This goes to accountability, which is what we're trying to get at. I certainly hope that when the Minister of Finance accepts our invitation, I can ask her why the government continues to finance, in this budget bill, the department to the level it does—it has grown 63% in budget and grown by 5,000 people—and how that's improved it.

I'll tell you what: Listen to what this says. It's what I'd like to ask her about and the reason Mr. Blaikie's amendment is so important. She goes on to say:

“I am writing to express my grave concern regarding the recent past and present state of the elver fishery in my local area and throughout the province. Too often, government decisions are made without adequate forethought of the effect on ordinary citizens.”

It's really important that we listen more to what our constituents say, because this right here captures the whole essence of what we're dealing with on so many issues with regard to this budget. She continues as follows:

“Too often, government decisions are made without adequate forethought of the effect on ordinary citizens. I have lived at my residence since 1990 and purchased the property next to my residence along”—I won't say the road in the community—“early in 2002. There was no evidence of any fishery taking place in my community other than occasional recreational fishing by various local residents for trout until late March of 2014 when I spotted people with flashlights on my property by the brook late at night and discovered trap nets in the brook the next morning. Since that time, every spring, my sleep has been disrupted by the lights of those fishing, the noise of their vehicles departing and the feeling that my privacy has truly been invaded by strangers.”

I would add that they're not strangers; they're criminals because they don't have a licence to fish.

● (6745)

I ask you to think—she's asking me, so on her behalf I'm asking all committee members in considering this budget and accountability to think—about how you would feel about strangers on your property at night. I cannot imagine that you would be comfortable with it.

The letter continues: “I have spoken with many property owners about it, and all have said they would be upset by such activity. My ex-spouse and I did ask the fishers not to use our property and not to put a trap-net in the area which we use as a place to launch our small watercraft. Our request was not respected. After my spouse and I separated, I was living alone. I feel increasingly vulnerable with strangers using the property and upset that I could not freely launch a small watercraft from my property as I had done over the decade prior. I contacted DFO and was told—”

This is important, because this budget allocates money to DFO. It claims, as the minister has in the House of Commons on the issue of accountability, that they've doubled the patrols during this period. But this is what people on the ground are saying who are living it, not people from Vancouver Quadra.

She continued, “I contacted DFO and was told that those fishing did not have a legal licence to do so. I was warned by DFO that the fishers were potentially dangerous individuals and that I should not confront them myself.”

So DFO has known this for a long time. I raised this as an accountability issue with the minister in November 2021. Again, I would like to ask the Minister of Finance why she has allowed this to happen with her colleague the Minister of Fisheries. That is what the mandate letter says: They are collectively responsible as a cabinet for the decisions that each other makes. That means the Minister of Finance is as responsible for this situation as any other minister, including the Prime Minister.

Her letter continued, “I contacted the RCMP to find out what my rights were as a property owner. I was told that it was within my right to put up fencing and a No Trespassing sign and that I was not required to allow the fishers to tie nets to trees on my property. I did put up a fence and signs and put a boat in my boat-watch area, but my boat was moved and a net was put in, which blocked my ability to access the water from my own property. On April 15, 2023, a few short days ago, I learned that DFO shut down the elver fishery for 45 days, and a notice to this effect was placed on the power pole by the spot on the shoulder of the road which the elver fishers have been using for parking.”

I've seen this in many spots in my riding. It's not even plasticized. It's just a—

The Chair: There's a point of order from MP Chatel.

● (6750)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, again, I'm not sure that fishing, although very interesting, has anything to do with the motion we have at hand, which is to support and to invite the minister to appear before the committee.

Mr. Chair, this is a discussion about fishing. We've heard a lot now that is not relevant to this motion.

The Chair: You're right, Madam Chatel. It is not relevant to the amendment to the motion, which is about the finance minister's appearance at our committee.

MP Perkins, again, could you stick to the amendment?

Mr. Rick Perkins: If I could respectfully disagree, I thought I explained through my last intervention about that minister that this is about accountability. This is about the accountability letters that the Prime Minister said.... This is about the Minister of Finance's accountability to Parliament, which she is ignoring. She has ignored the last three requests. There were three requests over the last while, but she has ignored four appearances at this committee.

You'll understand, I'm sure, members, that we don't believe that another polite request is having any impact, as the minister continues to ignore not only this committee but, frankly, Parliament as well, by only coming once a month. She has time for two hours of meetings at a Liberal convention here in Ottawa, but not two hours of time to come before the House of Commons finance committee to defend her budget.

The accountability aspect is a symbol for her lack of accountability to Parliament, and it's endemic in this government that ministers are not accountable to Parliament. Here you have me, as a parliamentarian, asking the Minister of Fisheries politely, respectfully, to do as the Prime Minister's letter says they are to do as ministers in their accountability, asking them to do something about lawlessness and not doing it in a political way.... This is not a political issue. Accountability to Parliament goes back to the founding of the mother of all parliaments at Westminster. That's the essence of our democracy.

We seem to be dealing an awful lot these days with questions from this government on what they think the essence of our democracy is. They think it seems to be okay to intimidate members of Parliament, to allow foreign governments to intimidate members of Parliament after they vote on basic human rights issues, on the imprisonment of Uyghurs in Uyghur states in China, and they express the defence of human rights in the House of Commons. Two years ago, the Prime Minister was sent briefing notes by our intelligence community that China is intimidating a member of Parliament. This is fundamental.

This issue is just as fundamental. The minister won't come to the committee and has refused requests to come in the past. I thought the member said they thought it was interesting.... I read your own documents that require ministers to be accountable and to work with parliamentarians in order to ensure, show and put pressure on the minister, because I think that's the only way we can do it. This issue is endemic within this government. This government does not respect Parliament, even though they ran on a campaign in 2015 to restore the integrity of Parliament.

When the mandate letter says to work "with your Opposition Critics", and the minister ignores what an opposition critic says privately month after month.... I'm sure that my colleague, our shadow minister for finance, has suffered the same thing. In fact, I suspect he's probably had few meetings with the Minister of Finance, if any, and has had discussions almost.... It's an odd thing to me that a member of Parliament on this committee would question the relevance of a minister ignoring a heartfelt letter to a minister asking, "Why are you ignoring our pleas?"

As this person says, why did property owners along the estuaries have to suffer this disturbance? Why is it a free-for-all in fishing? All the activities create confusion, misunderstanding and resent-

ment, emotions that only serve to create conflict rather than eradicate it. Furthermore, that the DFO shut down the fishery only served to stop those with legal licences. The illegal fishing continued. There needs to be some sort of plan put in place to protect the rights of property owners.

• (6755)

Mr. Yvan Baker: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: I have MP Baker with a point of order.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Mr. Chair, the motion before us is one to invite the Minister of Finance to speak at this committee. The member is not speaking to that. He's speaking about fishing. He's speaking about eels. He's speaking about a lot of things that are completely irrelevant to the work of this committee and to the motion before us. I would ask you to ask the member to stay on topic.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Chair, may I speak?

The Chair: No.

First, MP Perkins—

Ms. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Chair, may I speak to that point of order?

The Chair: Let me just speak to the point of order by MP Baker regarding MP Perkins.

Yes, MP Perkins, we're not at the fisheries committee. We're at the finance committee. MP Perkins, it's about sticking to the amendment to the motion, the amendment by MP Blaikie, which speaks to the Minister of Finance. It is not speaking about fisheries or about eels here.

On the point of order—

Ms. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Chair, I've asked to be recognized—

The Chair: Yes. I'm recognizing you.

Ms. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: —to speak to the point of order.

The Chair: Yes, on a point of order, I'm recognizing you.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: No, I'm not making a point of order. I wish to speak to the point of order.

The Chair: The point of order...yes.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you.

I've been listening very carefully to my colleague. He has been talking about fisheries, but he was talking about fisheries in the context of ministerial responsibility and the common purpose of cabinet deciding together on issues of ministerial responsibility.

He also spoke to the questions he would put to the Minister of Finance if she ever deems it...that she would come to a committee that is in fact here to study the finances, economics and budget of our government, of which she is the prime minister responsible. Fisheries are part of that. My colleague was talking about the kinds of questions he would put to the minister if she came here—the kinds of questions she should be accountable for.

I have been a minister. I have come to committee to defend my ministerial budgets and I always took that very seriously. I took ministerial responsibilities seriously. Any minister should do so. Even the thought that a minister of finance would put forward a budget—in other words, the budget for all of Canada on how Canada's government will run and administer the workings of the nation—then not make herself available to answer questions on that budget is, frankly, unbelievable and a dereliction of that duty and responsibility.

The fact that this speaker, my colleague, is talking about what he would ask her if she came seems to me to be quite appropriate. He happens to be in fisheries. He might be talking about something else, because budgets go to all ministries. Budgets of the nation go to all industries and all activities of the nation, and the minister should be here to respond.

• (6800)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order.

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Go ahead, MP Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure whether my colleague who just spoke realizes that there is no question that the Minister of Finance will be coming before this committee, as she has for all other legislation that comes from Finance. That's not a question. She will be coming before this committee. She's very happy to respond to this budget. I think we're very proud of federal budget 2023.

I would hope that the questions that will be put forward to our Minister of Finance, when she does come to here to be responsive on the federal budget 2023, will not—

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Chair, please, you cannot “point of order” a point of order. This is out of order.

The Chair: MPs, no cross-speaking....

MP Dzerowicz has the floor. Then we will go to your point of order on the point of order.

Again, to refocus the members, we are talking about the amendment before us: “That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023.”

MP Perkins should be speaking to that amendment. He hasn't said whether he's for or against this amendment. We'd like to hear that.

MP Dzerowicz, you have the floor right now.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I have a point of order, if I could, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The point of order is this: MP Dzerowicz has the floor.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Just to be fair, Mr. Chair, we Liberals have had very little time over the last few hours...hearing about eels and fisheries for a while.

My point of order is the following: There's no question—it is in the amendment Mr. Chair just read out—that our Minister of Finance would like to come before this committee to respond to federal budget 2023. That's not in question. I would hope the questions she will be asked when she does indeed come before this committee are not about eels, since I don't believe there's anything about eels in federal budget 2023.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

Go ahead, MP Findlay.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I do not know what just happened here, Mr. Chair.

You have someone point of ordering a point of order. I've never seen that before. That's not appropriate. My understanding is that the member broke into my comments on a point of order to say that the minister is coming. Well, then, what's the date? When is it happening? How does this committee know it's going to happen?

The reason why we're trying to find Minister Freeland is that she can't be found at this committee. She hasn't been found here in six months and she's barely in Parliament either, but she can speak at a Liberal convention tonight.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

This is debate.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

MP Findlay, you asked about the dates. It's in the amendment, MP Findlay, that it's scheduled on or before May 18, 2023, if you needed a date.

We are now back to MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That was entertaining, as I hope I've been entertaining.

As you can tell, I appreciate—and I assume all of my colleagues can appreciate—that I do this with the best intentions. I'm passionate about the people I represent. I represent 7,000 fishermen, and they need their voice heard because this government isn't....

Out of respect for my colleagues around the table, I will go.... I believe, as MP Findlay said, I was speaking to the motion, but I'll go directly back in a more direct route to the amendment of MP Blaikie that is at hand.

What I'd like to bring to the attention of this elongated meeting is a Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat document—and I'll refer to this for the translators—entitled “Meeting the Expectations of Canadians: Review of the Responsibilities and Accountabilities of Ministers and Senior Officials”.

I think you'll find this enlightening in the context of ministerial accountability to Parliament. If you want to grab a coffee, it might be a good time.

On page one, in the introduction, it reads:

Accountability in the Government of Canada is framed by our system of responsible government. This system is based on the Westminster model, the cornerstone of which is the doctrine of ministerial responsibility.

This is a Treasury Board of Canada document:

Parliament has a responsibility to hold the government to account. Ministers are accountable to Parliament for the exercise of authority assigned to the Crown under the constitution and under statutory law.

This is a Treasury Board document. It's not just the nice words of the government when they came in on open and transparent government in 2015, which seems to have been lost in the archives.

This document is from the Treasury Board, which is the controller of where all money goes. If you want to know the relevance of the Treasury Board to a budget, it decides how the budget spending gets done after the budget's been delivered.

My colleague MP Findlay sat on the Treasury Board. As I'm sure all those listening will be shocked to know, in my time as a ministerial assistant, I briefed my minister for the Treasury Board for seven years, so I know all about the considered cases and the appendix cases, and that details of the problems are in the appendix cases, where officials all agree and think the government doesn't need to look, but I digress.

Let's go back to the Treasury Board document, "Meeting the Expectations of Canadians: Review of the Responsibilities and Accountabilities of Ministers and Senior Officials". In paragraph two, it reads:

This review of the doctrine and practice of ministerial responsibility was conducted in response to direction from the Prime Minister to the President of the Treasury Board following the tabling of the Auditor General of Canada's November 2003 report. The report's investigation of the sponsorship program and advertising activities—

Some members of the Liberal Party will remember that.

—drew the attention of Parliament and the public to the issue of accountability.

The Library of Parliament, as you heard earlier, has also written on the issue of that incident. The document continues:

A number of other measures were taken at the time to address concerns about mismanagement of the sponsorship and advertising program, including the creation of an independent commission of inquiry led by Mr. Justice John Gomery to examine past behaviour in the sponsorship and advertising programs and to formulate recommendations in order to prevent mismanagement in the future.

Since December 2003—

This is a Treasury Board document.

—action has been taken on many fronts to strengthen accountability—

Here are some of the things that they said have happened in this document:

Management expectations have been clarified, and the capacity to meet them is being enhanced.

Wow, does that sound like bureaucratise.

• (6805)

It continues, "Improvements have been made in transparency and reporting to Parliament." This must be an old document because it doesn't seem to be that way now. It goes on to say, "Measures have been taken to enhance financial management."

Untendered contracts to McKinsey and to personal friends... Wow, something has happened. It's the old *Pomp & Circumstance*.

An hon. member: That's Mary Ng's friend, Amanda Alvaro.

Mr. Rick Perkins: What an absurd name for a company, by the way—to talk about *pomp and circumstance* in your name. Only a Liberal would call their company *Pomp & Circumstance*. That's who gets to do media training.

The fourth point is, "Greater attention is being paid to carrying out audits of departments and agencies, and audit capacity is being increased."

I'll tell you what. I don't think that's actually happened because I've made an OPQ—order paper question—through the House of Commons on one of the biggest subsidies that this budget has for business. They're called SR and ED. They're scientific research tax credits.

I asked the simple question when speaking of accountability: How many of the companies that receive SR and ED tax credits in Canada—and you have to be an incorporated company in Canada to receive them—actually produce intellectual property or tax? Who owns those patents and who is the beneficial owner of that Canadian company that received the tax credit?

This is \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year of tax credits. The policy is set out by the industry committee, but administered by the Canada Revenue Agency. In the area of accountability, the government has to respond to order paper questions within 45 days. Within 45 days, I got a response.

You would think that with that question, with \$4 billion a year of tax credits and with the list of those companies and the IP, I would get an overwhelming amount of information about all the great success that our largest business tax credit creates. You'd think it would've created all kinds of inventions of patents and that we would know who owns those patents and inventions and how it has benefited Canada.

I got one paragraph back. Do you know what that paragraph said? It said, in essence, that they don't know. It said that they don't track it. They don't know if there's any intellectual property that results from that and if there is, they don't know who owns it. By the way, it's a Canadian company that got the credit, but they actually don't know who owns the company.

Now that's government accountability at its finest.

This Treasury Board has fine words like the open and transparent thing, but apparently it doesn't work. That's \$4 billion a year. It's no wonder we have more debt added. It's \$1.1 trillion of the Trudeaus' debt. That's "Trudeaus" multiple; the two of them together. The inputs have impressive numbers, but on the outputs, we don't know.

To continue on page 2:

The focus of the report is on the role of Parliament, the ministry, and Treasury Board

—now this is at the essence of what we're talking about here with ministerial accountability, the role of Parliament and the ministry—

in the accountability regime. It deals specifically with matters of financial administration

—hey, what's a budget other than financial administration—

rather than the policy, as that is where the current concern about responsibility lies.

It seems like that stills exists today. It goes on to say:

Financial administration covers matters relating to administrative policy, financial management, expenditure plans, programs and policies of departments, personnel management, and other matters related to the prudent and effective use of public resources.

This report complements the review of the government's framework of Canada's crown corporations

—it has a footnote here that says, "Tabled in Parliament on February 17, 2005"—

and *The Financial Administration Act: Responding to Non-compliance*.

As we know, the Financial Administration Act is the act that governs all financial legalities and technicalities of spending money and raising money through taxes and spending it or borrowing it by the Government of Canada.

It goes on to say:

Mr. Justice Gomery has been mandated to take into account issues raised and commitments made in this review as he develops recommendations.

● (6810)

This report follows from an in-depth review of existing documents on the doctrine of ministerial responsibility and from consultations with noted experts and practitioners in the field.

I'll bet they looked at that paper I read in from Australia, that excellent paper that I think most members found enlightening.

Consultations on the accountability regime were held through a series of round tables with distinguished academics, current and former ministers and deputy ministers, and other stakeholders.

Footnote 4 adds:

See the list of those consulted in Section 6. Their valued insight and input helped shape the review's major findings...

We'll get to reading that list eventually about who was consulted so that we're informed about who gave these views.

This report follows from an in-depth review of existing documents on the doctrine of ministerial responsibility and from consultations with noted experts and practitioners in the field.

We went through that.

These consultations were also greatly aided by a discussion paper drafted by Professor Donald Savoie—

He's a great New Brunswick professor and a constant author of the mechanics and machinery of government, as it's called, and the roles of ministerial responsibility, political staff responsibility and prime ministerial responsibility, being quite a learned fellow on this and a proud Atlantic Canadian.

—who served as the Simon Reisman Fellow at the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat in 2004, and were supported by other eminent observers of Canadian government: Denis Desautels, former Auditor General of Canada; Robert Marleau, former Clerk of the House of Commons; and Camille Montpetit, former Deputy Clerk of the House of Commons.

Just in case you don't know who Simon Reisman was, he was an eminent public servant in the Government of Canada. He was the lead negotiator on the original free trade agreement with the United States in the late 1980s. Simon Reisman was a pretty irascible fellow but a guy I would want on my side in negotiating, because the Americans found him, even, one of the toughest negotiators. Donald Savoie serving as the chair in his name is quite an honour.

1.1 Structure of this report

This report explains in some detail the practice of ministerial responsibility in Canada, focussing in particular on how:

responsibilities are assigned;

the people with those responsibilities are held to account; and

consequences are delivered when performance is found to be wanting.

That's an interesting point. I'm sure the structure of this report will be enlightening for everyone.

I'm now turning to the next page. That's for the translators so that they can follow along and provide us with the excellent service that they do. We thank them very much for their long hours and dedication.

Given the centrality and complexity of the accountability regime, the government believes that it is important to begin with a sound understanding of the existing principles and practices in Parliament and in government itself. Canadians, in judging the best way ahead, will want to know what mechanisms are currently in place, how they relate to each other, and how they have evolved. As will be shown in the report, a robust accountability regime is in place, and it has deep traditions and well-developed roles.

I know I gave a shout-out to the translators, but at this stage I want to give a shout-out to my new legislative assistant, Graham O'Brien, a fine fellow who helped find some of these documents for me.

An hon. member: Good job, Graham.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't know if Graham is still here, but I know his mom and dad are probably watching. His father was a fine candidate for us in the 2019 election in Toronto. I have to tell you that Graham has done yeoman's work in this new role, as a young man taking over from the excellent work that I thought would be really difficult to replace in Matthew Clark.

By the way, Matthew didn't leave me for another MP. I know that's what you're all thinking. Good people get poached; not to overuse that word, but people get poached. I guess Matthew did get poached. He now works for the Ambassador of the United States. He joined that illustrious office one week before President Biden visited Canada, so he was pretty much put under the gun.

Mr. Eric Duncan: They're good researchers.

Mr. Rick Perkins: They are good researchers.

Mr. Eric Duncan: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: They know it well.

• (6815)

I'm sure this would be enlightening to the Minister of Finance if she could spare the two hours to listen. In our effort of finding Freeland, we could actually probably send her the blues. Maybe she could find the time between panels at the Liberal convention to take a look.

The second paragraph here, on page 3.... How many pages is this? It is only 55 pages. It reads:

Therefore, the first few sections of the report describe the current accountability regime. Section 1 provides an overview of accountability in responsible government, explains the purpose of an accountability regime, and outlines the doctrine of ministerial responsibility and its practice in Parliament and in government.

I know that my colleague MP Findlay knows this well, because she was an exceptionally well-briefed and a knowledgeable minister of the Crown who always respects Parliament.

Section 2 [of this report] deals with the role of Parliament (particularly the House of Commons)—

That's where we are today as members of Parliament and as a standing committee of the House of Commons.

—considers in some depth the role of the key mechanisms that Parliament uses to hold government to account, and explores the accountabilities of ministers and senior officials in this context. Section 3 examines the essential aspects of accountability in the ministry, touching on the role of the prime minister and the Privy Council Office, and addresses how ministers and deputy ministers manage the political-bureaucratic interface. Section 4—

I'm looking forward to that.

—outlines the central role played by...Treasury Board and its Secretariat in relation to managerial accountability, particularly as it concerns the responsibilities of deputy ministers for financial management.

The last section of the report—

It is the ultimate section one might say.

—describes a framework for reform. In this context it is important to note the principal lessons learned from past efforts at reform. Knowing where we have come from will help guide where we should go.

Isn't that a truism that is absolutely correct all the time? You need to know where you have been to guide where you should go.

The government operates in a challenging environment and reforms, both in Parliament and in the government, can carry a high cost if not carefully planned and executed. Reforms must take us forward, not backward. Section 5 outlines each element of the framework and identifies the following for each of the core accountability mechanisms in Parliament, the ministry, and...Treasury Board.

The three that are listed here after this paragraph say, “the specific challenges noted by the distinguished participants in the consultation phase of the report; the measures that the government has already undertaken to address these challenges; and the core values and objectives that will guide the government in developing its action plan.”

Isn't that what governments like to do—develop action plans? Executing on them...sometimes not so much, but developing one, oh boy, that is fun.

The specific measures the government will be taking to strengthen accountability are outlined in—

This is in italics.

—*Management in the Government of Canada: A Commitment to Continuous Improvement.*

I'm glad we're committed to continuous improvement. One of the ways we get continuous improvement, just as an aside, is through elections. Through an election, we get continuous improvement. That's the beauty of our democracy because we can elect a new and better government.

Section 1.2 at the bottom of page 3 is called “Overview of accountability in responsible government”.

Any discussion of accountability in our constitutional system—the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy—must be informed by an understanding of how that system functions and why. Although the Westminster system developed incrementally, rooted in evolving democratic values, rather than abstract or static concepts, it has deep integrity, and the roles of different players complement each other in a fine balance.

It's sort of like a fine wine.

It is thus both an evolving system that has adapted to changing circumstances and an organic structure in which changes in one area inevitably have repercussions in another. This section provides an overview of the accountability regime. Each of the constituent elements is explored in greater depth in the sections that follow.

• (6820)

The Westminster system is defined by its distinctive accountability features: the twin tenets of parliamentary sovereignty and responsible government. Under this constitutional system, Parliament can make any law it wishes within the limits of the constitution—for example, the division of jurisdictional authority under the *Constitution Act, 1867* and the rights set out in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The executive is responsible to the legislature—that is, the government of the day remains in power only so long as it commands the confidence of the elected House of Commons.

Of course, as an aside, we know the only way that's possible right now is through the costly coalition agreement between the NDP and Liberals. This has caused, in essence, a working majority for the Liberals, which is obviously not something the people vote for.

I will go on with this report. On page 4, it says:

The executive is therefore accountable to the legislature for the exercise of its authority, and together they are accountable to the electorate.

Now, I would like to welcome the new guests who have arrived. I guess we're drawing a crowd with this insightful discussion about parliamentary accountability of ministers of the Crown.

I welcome you to the room.

A voice: Have any of you seen Minister Freeland?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I could ask that, as well.

Have any of you found Freeland? We are searching for her.

Voices: Oh, oh!

A voice: It's a negative, no.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Apparently, those who arrived did not see her wandering the halls of Parliament. She must be preparing for her discussion with Hillary Clinton.

Because of this, I will go on to page 4 of this Treasury Board document, which I'm sure is going to be exceptionally insightful for members of the government:

Because in this system the members of the executive sit in the legislature and require its confidence, their accountability is anything but a remote theoretical construct—it is a living, daily reality in the House.

Ministers, who together as the ministry form the government of the day, exercise executive authority in this system. These ministers, who act largely through the work of a non-partisan public service, are accountable to Parliament both individually and collectively.

Again, isn't that the essence of why we are here? We're trying to get parliamentary accountability from the Minister of Finance in our search for Freeland.

All accountabilities in Canadian government flow from ministers' individual and collective accountability to Parliament.

I think that's an important point to pause on. I will come back to this, depending on things.

At this stage, Mr. Chair, I would like to move to adjourn.

• (6825)

The Chair: Please repeat that, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry. I had hoped the microphone could pick me up.

At this stage of my presentation, which I may or may not have to continue, I put a motion forward, again, to move to adjourn. I will assure everyone that, unlike the last time, I will vote for my own motion.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Beech does not have an authorized headset on and therefore a vote can't count, according to the Standing Orders.

The Chair: He can vote thumbs up or thumbs down. Yes, he can.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: MP Perkins, that's a vote in favour of your continuing. We are in mile seven or eight now in this marathon.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, I thank you for your kind words and the kind endorsement by the government.

I am somewhat disappointed in my colleagues who clearly have had enough of me. Maybe that's because we had a caucus meeting this week and they heard me then.

I will continue since the government wants me to—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have a quick point of order if I may, Mr. Chair.

I am sorry to interrupt.

I just wondered if Mr. Perkins might be willing to entertain a question off of a point of order, because I know he referred earlier to the requirement of the government to have the confidence of the House of Commons. This is a subject that's of some particular fascination to me.

I think it's quite important. He's talked a lot about the fundamental principles of Westminster parliamentary democracies. Of course, this is a very important part of the Westminster system. He's talked a little bit about ministerial responsibility and, I'm pretty sure at one point, some of the extraordinary powers of the Prime Minister. Of course, one of the most extraordinary powers of the Prime Minister is the power to determine willy-nilly, if you will, whether the Prime Minister enjoys the confidence of the House or not, even without a vote in the House of Commons.

This is something that I think has been problematic. He talked about the U.K. being the kind of mother of the Westminster parliamentary system that we still look to for precedents, and they determined some time ago, several years ago now, that a Prime Minister should no longer have that power. In fact, if a Prime Minister does not observe a fixed election date, that Prime Minister would have to go to the House of Commons and get a vote of a two-thirds majority in order to be able to part ways, as it were, with a fixed election date as prescribed in law.

I just wondered if, in the course of his comments, he might be willing to talk a little bit about the confidence convention, some of the ways that this extraordinary power of the Prime Minister has been abused and whether he thinks that's something that the House of Commons should look to curtail.

• (6830)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

The floor is yours, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the spirit of collegiality and the earnestness with which that question was posed by MP Blaikie, I probably will get to most of the answer on that one once I'm through the 55 pages here. We're on page 4 for the information of those watching.

Let me just quickly say that I think perhaps if the government had followed through on the—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I just have a brief point of order.

We are a bilingual country, so will you read that in French as well, I hope?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I will not torture people. I have been taking French for a year, and I have done several French immersion courses. I'm getting better—*un petit peu*—but I will save you that pain right now.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I see that MP Ste-Marie has perked up, and we'll be grading that French.

Go ahead, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have the privilege of sharing a seat in the House of Commons with our Bloc colleagues. Dr. Garon is my seatmate. Sometimes we practise French, but I will stick with his advice right now, which is not to do it too much in public.

With regard to MP Blaikie's question, I think it's a great question. Perhaps the discussion of the fixed election dates and the Prime Minister's power...because it was former prime minister Stephen Harper who brought in fixed election dates and removed that power in a majority government for the Prime Minister to pick a time that best suits them. We have that.

Obviously, the fixed election date, as I understand it, still applies in a minority government as well, unless the Prime Minister loses the confidence of the House. We know that the supply agreement between MP Blaikie's party, the NDP, and the government prohibits the fall of this government before the fixed election date. Perhaps he could pursue that with his leader to see if he thinks we should have an earlier date. They can challenge that.

In addition to that, I think you could add a fixed election date. I know this is off-topic, but the chair allowed a question a little off Mr. Blaikie's motion. I think it was the PROC committee—I'm not sure which committee of the House it was—that was supposed to look at, or started to look at the government's promise that the 2015 campaign would be the last election with first past the post.

There are a lot of different views on that. Probably within each of the caucuses, there are different views about the best way to do that. I think that process started.

My own interpretation of it was when the government discovered, when they ran the numbers on the various scenarios and their thoughts for the day, that somehow it would not be advantageous to them. Somehow, they thought they would lose the thought that they were the national governing party and could naturally win every election under the current system. Strangely, and shockingly, they abandoned that promise, too.

I'm sure MP Blaikie was disappointed, as many Canadians were, that we didn't even see through the process to look at the options and have a good public discourse. This discourse would also have been in Parliament about that fundamental issue of how we elect parliamentarians and how we elect our government out of that system.

It is an area still worthy of discussion and review, without a doubt, as we are talking about the issue of ministerial accountability. I think it's fundamental, and I appreciate that MP Blaikie agrees with me, that ministerial accountability is fundamental to the successful functioning in our system.

In this report from the Treasury Board Secretariat entitled "Meeting the Expectation of Canadians: Review of the Responsibilities and Accountabilities of Ministers and Senior Officials", on page 4 in the fourth paragraph, where I left off, the report reads:

Although Parliament does not exercise executive authority, it is the principal guarantor of the government's accountability, scrutinizing the government's policies and actions and holding it to account. Parliament has a spectrum of tools for doing this, ranging from its role in the passage of legislation to the review and approval of public expenditure to the interrogations of Question Period

These are important elements.

But while the specific tool may vary, the environment remains constant—that of partisan politics. Parliament and its processes are inherently political.

I would say as an aside, we sometimes hear people saying, "That's partisan" or "That's political." Some people think that's a

bad thing, but actually, it's a key element of democracy. All of us on this committee and all of us in this House join political parties because we believe there are certain solutions to the challenges the country faces.

We have different viewpoints. There's a reason why MP Blaikie is a member of the New Democratic Party, and there's a reason why Bloc members are part of that party. There's a reason why you choose to join the Liberal Party or our party. We all have different solutions and maybe, sometimes, different ideas about what the challenges are that face the country.

• (6835)

None of them are less legitimate than the others.

The Chair: MP Perkins, I'm sorry to interrupt.

We're going to suspend at this time. I think that's on a positive note.

I know that you're going to work on the French.

We're going to focus on the amendment and we're going to suspend until next week. We'll see everybody next week.

Thank you.

[The meeting was suspended at 8:38 p.m., Thursday, May 4]

[The meeting resumed at 11:05 a.m., Tuesday, May 9]

The Chair: Okay, colleagues, we're back, and I call this meeting to order.

We are resuming meeting number 87 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the debate on the motion of PS Beech and the amendment by MP Blaikie in relation to the study of Bill C-47.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either the floor, or English or French. For those in the room you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Again, just to focus, members, we were on a discussion of MP Blaikie's amendment. That would come at the end of the main motion, and it reads:

That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023.

MP Perkins last had the floor. I have MP Lawrence and MP Morantz on the list after MP Perkins.

Go ahead, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, committee members. I'm starting to feel at home at this committee. I appreciate your indulgence over the last few hours on this issue, which really has to do with Mr. Blaikie's amendment and the primary motion by MP Beech and our seeking ministerial accountability for the budget implementation bill—

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have Mr. Beech on a point of order.

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm sorry. I don't want to interrupt you too early, but it's been a while since we last left, and I just forgot whether you're speaking for or against the amendment. If you could clarify if you're speaking for or against the amendment, I look forward to the rest of your argument.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech.

We'll go back to MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I believe the amendment is a good start but could probably use some improvement. I will get to that.

For those who have not been watching, that's too bad, but I think you'll find this enlightening going forward. The issue is that parliamentary committees call ministers. It's an invitation, really, to call ministers to appear on their legislation, because we can't generally compel ministers to appear. This legislation is the implementation of the Liberal government's budget bill.

As the finance committee has invited the Minister of Finance to appear in the last three months on three occasions and the minister has not availed herself of that opportunity to explain and I guess to promote in some ways her initiatives, from the economic statement on, there is a feeling in Parliament that the minister may not show again—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of information, Mr. Chair, and I also don't want to interrupt too early.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's okay. It lets me get some water.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: For those who might be listening—and I know that they were, those who have been following you along, Mr. Perkins, and were I'm sure besotted with your speech about eels the other day—I do want to remind everyone who might be listening that we are right now debating the amendment by MP Blaikie—

An hon. member: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but what's the point of order?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: The point of order is just to remind that we are debating the amendment of Daniel Blaikie—

An hon. member: She already did that.

An hon. member: Which law are you relying on to make the point of order...?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:—and the fact is that there is no question and we agree on our side that the Minister of Finance should be here before us to respond to federal budget 2023—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, this is not a valid point of order.

The Chair: MP Dzerowicz, what's your point of order?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I just wanted to make sure that was stated for the record, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It's still not a valid point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

Again, MP Perkins, just to refocus again, we are on MP Blaikie's amendment to the motion:

That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance is scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023.

Go ahead, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I understand from the member that her perspective is that there's no question, but there has been a question, and the question has been put that this same invitation was made to the minister three times in the last six months, and she has blown off this committee and not bothered to attend, which obviously then causes concern that the minister again will not attend on this particular issue.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: MP Chatel, go ahead on a point of order.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If we're debating this motion, can we have the current status of the invitation to the DPM?

The Chair: I'll just check with the clerk on the status of the invitation to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Do we have any information?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Thank you, Mrs. Chatel.

I received an email this morning, before the meeting, advising the committee that the Minister of Finance would be available to appear on May 16, so next Tuesday.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that, Clerk.

I'm not sure if all the members caught that. I think that MP Perkins was just putting on his interpretation, so could you repeat that for all the members?

The Clerk: I got an email just before the meeting saying that the Minister of Finance would be available to appear before the committee next Tuesday, May 16. I don't know yet if it's for one hour or two hours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's an important point, because the request is for two hours. I think there is still a lot of discussion to be had about why two hours is vitally important. I believe that, for now, I would like to get myself put back on the list, but I'm going to yield to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Perkins.

We just heard that the minister has emailed, and we're looking at the 16th when the minister would be available to appear before our committee.

I have MP Lawrence, MP Morantz, MP Dzerowicz and then Mr. Perkins again.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: If it's okay with the committee, I'd defer my slot to Marty.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to introduce a subamendment to Mr. Blaikie's amendment. I move the following:

That the amendment be amended by replacing the words "and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023." after the words "on the bill" with the following: on or before May 18th, 2023 provided that, if the Minister of Finance has not appeared by May 18, 2023 amendments to Bill C-47, notwithstanding subparagraph (b)(i), be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11:00 a.m. ET the business day following the Minister appearing at Finance committee for a duration of no less than 2 hours.

I have that motion translated as well. I can pass my copy up to you, if you like, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

This is an subamendment to the amendment by MP Blaikie, and it's being distributed right now, so we'll just give a moment for all members to see it. It's been sent by email to members.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, does that mean we will have a new speaking list?

The Chair: Yes, we will for MP Morantz's subamendment.

MP Morantz, you have the floor at this time.

Do you want to speak to this, MP Morantz?

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say, Mr. Chair, that I had some glimmer of hope yesterday that perhaps this finding Freeland saga may have been resolved when the finance minister appeared in the House for the sixth time this year.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, Ms. Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you for sending the new amendments, but didn't we rule already on that last week, and it was defeated? We are back to this motion to invite the minister to come for two hours, and now we have a date when she is available on the 16th, so can we just adopt it, move on and do our job on the committee?

An hon. members: It's on the same point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm just going to confer with the clerk.

We're going to suspend.

- (1115) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1130)

The Chair: I'll just ask MP Morantz if he can read the subamendment to the amendment into the record again.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, I saw a glimmer of hope yesterday when the finance minister was in the House for the sixth time this year. That gives me some hope that our finding Freeland endeavour is well under way.

Having said that and having introduced the subamendment, I'd like to cede my time back to—

The Chair: I have a speaker's list. I have PS Beech and then MP Dzerowicz on next. Then it's MP Lawrence and then MP Perkins.

It's a new list.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Chair, I have a point of order.

My understanding is that when a subamendment is introduced, a new list is created.

The Chair: That was the new list. I just got it. I saw PS Beech put his hand up, so I have MP Morantz, PS Beech and then MP Dzerowicz.

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, before the break I had told the clerk I had wanted to be on the list.

The Chair: I did not see it. I did not recognize it.

PS Beech is up after MP—

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Chair, could you just check with the clerk?

The Chair: It's what I saw as the chair, MP Morantz. I have PS Beech and then I have MP Dzerowicz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm happy to continue.

At the end of the day, all we're asking is for the minister to come to the committee to answer some questions about her budget. The budget is the major legislative initiative of this government.

As I've said many times already in this committee, what I find unfortunate about the budget implementation bill is that most of it isn't really about the budget at all. There's something like 50 different pieces of legislation. Many of them have nothing at all to do with budgeting. The document itself is well over 400 pages long.

To deal with the fact that...the government is essentially admitting that the budget implementation bill has little to do with the budget, because in its motion it wants to refer massive portions of the budget off to various committees that are not the finance committee. I don't blame all the people who are watching us right now and wondering why it is we're talking about a subamendment to an amendment to a motion on reviewing the budget implementation bill that in and of itself refers the vast majority of the budget implementation bill off to committees that have nothing to do with budgeting.

For example, the motion calls for part 3, division 2, and part 4, divisions 21, 22, 23 and 24 to go to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. That's not a committee I associate with reviewing the finance minister's budget in the time that I've been here. The motion goes on to say that with regard to part 4 divisions 13, 14, 15, 35 and 38...those are going to go to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

I'm sure many of these are important initiatives, but I really don't understand what they're doing in a budget bill. It seems to me that this is circumventing the ability of Parliament to properly scrutinize major legislative initiatives that should be tabled, introduced and debated, and go through the proper readings and committee stages that any bill would go through. Instead, in order to fast-track or, essentially, short-circuit the process, members of the government decided they're going to throw these in here.

We learned a valuable lesson about this practice just a few years ago, Mr. Chair, when in a very similar bill, there was a seemingly innocuous provision. It was an amendment to the Criminal Code that would allow the Attorney General and Minister of Justice to grant something that had not been available to that point in Canadian law before. It was something called a prosecution deferral agreement. At the time, the committee was kept in the dark. I think some committee members, even including Liberal members, raised concern about that provision at the time.

Why is this here? Why are we doing this? Why are we giving this additional power?

The government of the day, which is the current government we have now, didn't tell the committee. It's possible some committee members knew the actual intent. I don't know. I'm not going to assume that. I can't get into their minds and know what they knew or what they were thinking. The fact of the matter is that the provision was put there intentionally, so pardon me for being a bit suspicious, Mr. Chair, when I see a budget bill that has literally dozens and dozens of provisions that have nothing to do with the budget.

I can go on. Here's another one, regarding part 4, divisions 16, 17, 18 and 19 of the bill. Those are being referred to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

I can go on and on and on, Mr. Chair. I have grave concerns about the lack of accountability.

All we're asking for with this massive, 400-page document is that the finance minister appear for two hours. She hasn't been here since November. It's not a lot to ask. I think Canadians expect it. If the committee members don't want to listen to the will of this com-

mittee, then listen to the will of Canadians, who would like to hear from the finance minister of this country...to answer questions about her budget. That's the impasse we have here, right now.

I could go on and on. I'm going to ask the clerk to recycle me back on the list. I will give up the floor to the next speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz.

We have PS Beech, then MP Dzerowicz, then MP Lawrence.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A voice: Then it's MP Perkins, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You keep forgetting me on the list.

The Chair: No, it's MP Morantz, then—

Mr. Terry Beech: I want to make sure Mr. Perkins is on the list. Do we have that?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Terry Beech: That's excellent. If there's one person who isn't getting enough time at this committee and who we all want to hear from, it's Mr. Perkins.

I'm happy to speak to this subamendment.

Mr. Morantz just talked about the government not wanting to listen to the will of the committee. Just to be clear for everyone listening.... I wish I had the editing capacity to go back in time and grab some clips from various points in this Conservative filibuster and the time before. The will of this committee is the consensus of the majority of its members. There has been a resolution on the table for just over 14 hours, which has the support of the majority of the members. The reason why we're in a filibuster, by definition, is because the Conservatives are trying to subvert the democratic will of this committee.

If people want to know where that comes from, it actually didn't start 14 hours of committee time ago. It started almost a month ago, when the Conservatives started talking about the kinds of things they'd like to see in order to have a reasonable study on the Budget Implementation Act. There were various iterations of how.... The goalposts on what they actually wanted were moved until we got to this particular point.

In terms of properly scrutinizing the BIA.... Mr. Morantz just spoke against part of the resolution on the table, not directly to this subamendment, which sends pieces of the BIA to different committees. That reflects the practice we did last year. There was a sense of disappointment then, because there was another Conservative filibuster last year. This meant that, by the time we sent out items to the committees, it was far too late. It was Conservative members who said, "Hey, it would be really great if we could do this again this year, but we could send it out earlier." Then they filibustered and stopped the ability for us to send them out.

In fact, the way this worked was, we went out to all parties and said, “Hey, which sections would you like to send to which committees?” Then we included all of that in the consensus motion supported by the majority of this committee.

I want to take this opportunity, while I have the microphone—then I’ll end it here—to clarify something else I heard Mr. Perkins say. He can address this, because I’m sure he will have the mike sometime in the near future, perhaps for some length. He asked the question, “How could the minister possibly have been responding to an invitation that wasn’t sent?” That, I think, is a good question. The resolution on the table didn’t originally have an invitation to the minister. Why is that? The reason why it didn’t have an invitation to the minister was because the pre-study motion, which was passed by all parties sitting around this table, already invited the minister. She responded to that. She says she will be here next Tuesday on the 16th, which is before the 18th. That is something I verbalized over 14 hours of concerted filibuster ago. She responded to that request. She has.

The Conservatives might complain, “Wait a second. We want her to come for two hours and she hasn’t clarified how long she’s coming for.” Unfortunately, the committee has had an amendment on the floor for 14 hours. It’s an amendment by Daniel Blaikie, who is the NDP member of this committee. It moves to send an invitation to the minister to appear at this committee for two hours. That is the very amendment the Conservatives have been filibustering. When they say they want the minister to appear... Well, I would say their actions speak much louder than their words. If somebody who is better at editing than I am wants to go back and collect all of those data points and put them all together, I imagine it would not be that flattering for the Conservatives.

Speaking directly to the subamendment, this is trying to do a similar thing done in their first subamendment, which was voted down by the members of this committee. It was ruled out of order by the chair on the third subamendment to this motion on the floor.

Therefore, we will be voting against it.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech.

I have MP Dzerowicz next.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I agree with my colleague that this amendment to the amendment is basically a different way of doing the same thing that a previous motion had done and that we voted down on this committee.

At the very heart of what I think the opposition would like to see is to ensure that our Minister of Finance comes before us to speak to federal budget 2023. Our clerk has indicated, and updated our committee this morning to indicate, that she has agreed to attend on May 16.

As well, in case the opposition doesn’t know this, we are also very much in agreement with the amendment that Mr. Blaikie had put forward, that the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled before May 18. There’s no question that the minister is coming. There’s no question that she’s going to be answering questions about federal

budget 2023. There’s no question that she has to be here to answer questions about an extraordinarily important budget.

I’ll also say to you that there seems to be some question about why we’re sending out sections of federal budget 2023 to various committees. Well, I know it was something that was asked for by I believe Mr. Chambers. I think it was asked for by Gabriel Ste-Marie. I think it was asked for by Mr. Blaikie. This is very typical practice. I’ve been blessed to be on this committee for a number of years. We do this almost every single year. This is typical. You send out portions to get feedback from other committees that are already looking at these topics.

To Mr. Morantz’s comments about the relevance of a number of items that are in federal budget 2023, that they are put in with no rhyme or reason, I would say that this is absolutely not true. Every single thing that is in federal budget 2023 is relevant to...either we’ve mentioned a budget in a BIA, in a past budget; it is directly relevant to what we have talked about in terms of our budgets. This was not the practice of the Conservative government before we came into power. They would throw things in that had no mentions ever in previous budgets.

I’ll say to you, Mr. Chair, that I’m disappointed. I think if we had not had the filibuster, which is being led by the Conservatives, then we would have heard from a list of witnesses who had to be cancelled today. We would have heard from the Canada Infrastructure Bank. We would have heard from the Centre for Future Work. We would have heard from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. We would have heard from Canada’s Building Trades Unions, the Smart Prosperity Institute, the Canadian Health Coalition, the Canadian Medical Association, the Daily Bread Food Bank and the Mississauga Food Bank.

These are all people we would have benefited from hearing from. I think they would have given us very some good thoughts about the budget, and would maybe have posed some questions that we might want to be considering as we move forward, instead of us debating a subamendment to an amendment that we had already, in different words, voted down before.

This is just wasting time, Mr. Chair, and I feel sad about that. I think we had a lot of witnesses who would have given us a lot of really excellent information today. I think we could have moved on to truly talking about federal budget 2023. We could have moved on to preparing to have our Minister of Finance come before us to answer questions about federal budget 2023.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

You have a point of order, MP Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Yes. On a point of order, what is the chair’s ruling with respect to the admissibility of the subamendment?

The Chair: This subamendment?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Yes.

The Chair: We are debating it.

Mr. Adam Chambers: So the chair's ruling is that it is in good order and it is admissible. Is that correct?

The Chair: This subamendment is admissible, yes.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Next on the list is MP Lawrence. Then I have MP Morantz and MP Perkins.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much.

Although we certainly have had differences, I respect Mr. Beech and our continued negotiation both in public and off camera. I'll be really bold here and say—I'm hoping my whip is listening as I'm saying this—that if Mr. Beech is willing to go on record, right now, and guarantee that the Minister of Finance will appear at this committee for two hours, Conservatives would be in a very good place to move forward.

I know that this isn't part of the normal procedure, but I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, if we might have unanimous consent, if required, for Mr. Beech to answer my question.

Mr. Terry Beech: We don't have unanimous consent.

The Chair: We do not have unanimous consent.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Conservatives believe, as Mr. Perkins said, that Mr. Blaikie's amendment was a good start. In fact, I might even say it was a great start, as it would give the Canadian public the ability to hear the Finance minister appear before a finance committee about the \$490 billion that she wants to spend; however, our challenge and why we believe that the amendment needs a sub-amendment is that the Minister of Finance has at least three times refused invitations to this committee, so we as Conservatives and more importantly as Canadians are left without recourse.

Lord Denning, the famous British jurist, once said that where there is no consequence, there is no law.

I'd just like to ask the clerk—if necessary, we'll go through you, Mr. Chair—what recourse this committee has if the Minister of Finance decides.... She's a very busy person, and she has many other commitments. If she decides, for whatever reason, to not attend despite her acceptance of our invitation, what recourse does the committee have if she rescinds that acceptance and decides not to attend the meeting?

The Chair: We shouldn't be speculating on any of these questions, so, MP Lawrence, continue.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Well, I'll tell you there. The answer is none. There is absolutely zero recourse this committee has if, in fact, she decides that.

It's a bit unfortunate that the chair sort of occasionally shows his bias and his party by refusing to answer the most simple and basic of questions, not even permitting his clerk to respond to this.

I will tell you, and no one will debate this because it's fact: This committee would have zero recourse. We're in a situation where three before this committee has invited the Minister of Finance to come before us. That's the majority of the committee. If we want to talk about subverting democracy—

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to know whether the Deputy Prime Minister has confirmed that she'll appear before the committee on Tuesday, May 16. If so, why aren't we moving forward with Mr. Blaikie's amendment to the motion?

[*English*]

The Chair: Clerk, we received an email that the Minister of Finance would appear on the 16th, correct? Yes, that is correct, MP Chatel.

Go ahead, MP Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Perhaps the chair will answer this question. Was there any commitment for the length of the appearance of the Minister of Finance? Was it for one hour, two hours or 10 minutes? Was there any commitment with respect to the time she would appear?

The Chair: I have not seen it.

Clerk, I don't know if there was a time. No, there wasn't.

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The minister would appear on May 16th.

Mr. Terry Beech: To be helpful to my colleague, because of the current filibuster, no invitation from this committee requesting a two-hour appearance has ever been able to go out, because the Conservatives have been filibustering for the last 14 hours, just to clarify that. I would also clarify that I wonder what recourse the committee has if the Conservatives continue to filibuster past her timed appearance on Tuesday.

The Chair: We're not going to entertain those questions either.

MP Lawrence, you do have the floor. We did receive an email from the minister that the minister would appear on the 16th.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To be clear, there's absolutely no time allocation with respect to that. It literally could be as short as a minute. I'm sure that the parliamentary secretary would have in the course of his duties.... As I've said, I do have respect for Mr. Beech, a strong negotiator for his side, no doubt, who certainly may one day serve in cabinet. I don't know.

I'm sure that he would have shared with the Minister of Finance and deputy leader the Conservatives' consistent request that she appear for two hours.

We're left in the situation, Mr. Chair, where have a Minister of Finance who has disregarded three times the request of this committee to attend. We have an invitation that has been accepted, but we have no time with respect with how long she will appear, nor do we have any recourse.

As Lord Denning famously wrote many decades ago, where there are no consequences, there are no laws. We have here a pattern of disregarding and subverting democracy by the Minister of Finance. Excuse my skepticism but her pattern would tell us that perhaps she is too busy to give her grace or has other things that are more important to her than the finance committee. That is why we need a subamendment to be put in place.

In earlier debate, it was questioned whether we could make other portions of a study of legislation contingent on a minister's appearance. I'd actually like to read into the record a precedent that has been set and was actually agreed upon by the languages committee, I believe. The motion was moved by Marc G. Serré, and it was item number two with respect to the amendment. It said:

amendments to Bill C-13 be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11:00 a.m. ET the business day following the last meeting with the ministers and departments;

You'll note the similarity to the subamendment moved by my friend Marty Morantz. So we have a subamendment that has been found by the chair to be admissible, in good order. We have a precedent where this has appeared before.

My question for my friends, and this is a legitimate question, is if they really believe this invitation is valid and their minister—they are all one government, I believe they caucus on a weekly basis, like the Conservatives, the NDP, the Green Party and the Bloc Québécois—will actually show up, why are they concerned?

This will move it ahead right now. There's no legitimate reason for them not to accept the subamendment if they believe the Minister of Finance will show up and do her job.

Once again, Mr. Chair, with unanimous consent, I would just like to, if I could, if we're agreeable, ask them to answer my question as to if they are agreeable to the minister showing up for two hours. Clearly, you wouldn't vote for something knowing full well that it won't happen. That would be beneath the honourable members and would be a subversion of democracy, as my colleague said.

By the way, just in respect to clips, I'm happy to have anything I've said here any time clipped. If that's a threat, bring it on.

There's no need for veiled threats here. That's beneath the member. If you want to see some entertaining clips go to some Liberal filibusters. You'll see some very entertaining things that have been said.

But I like to keep things professional and above board. To me a deal is a deal. I am just a simple farmer that way. When I agree on something, when I shake on something, it's a deal.

If this two-hour invitation is legitimate, then they'll have no concern. Like I said, there's already been a precedent set, with almost the exact same language, to make the movement of a bill contingent on the appearance of a minister.

With permission, I would love to hear from one of my Liberal colleagues what possible reason they could have for objecting to this subamendment if in fact it is actually the intent of the Minister of Finance to show up for two hours?

Is that acceptable to the chair? I can see now that it's not.

The Chair: MP Lawrence, I have MP Morantz, MP Perkins, MP Masse and MP Dzerowicz after that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Okay. I'm happy to wait.

I just want to sum up where we are for everyone watching.

We have a budget put in front of Canadians for \$490 billion. The Conservatives on this side of the table are asking for the Minister of Finance to show up for two hours. We have an amendment put forward by the NDP for two hours.

However, given the Minister of Finance's pattern of disrespect for this committee, the three times she has refused to come to this committee and the fact that we have zero recourse and zero consequences toward the minister if she decides for a fourth time not to come here, we have put a subamendment in place that amends it so that progress on the bill will continue after her appearance.

There can be no reason for Liberals not to support this, other than the fact that they don't believe the Minister of Finance will show up to do her job. We are asking her to come for two hours to talk to the Canadian people for \$490 billion. That is \$8 billion a minute.

She had two hours this weekend to talk to Liberal insiders. She had two hours for Liberal donors.

The Chair: I have MP Chatel on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I want to point out that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance agreed to meet with the committee next Tuesday, so May 16. She will be here to answer members' questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, that's not a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Yes, it is a point of order, because it seems as though my fellow members are debating something else.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chatel.

To clarify, that is correct. We received an email from the minister that she would want to appear on the 16th.

Go ahead, MP Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Yes, I would encourage the member to review our subamendment. If, in fact, it was the intention of these Liberals to have the Minister of Finance appear, they would have no problem with it. They would have absolutely no problem with two hours.

They must believe she is not going to show up. That's the only possible reason they would object to our subamendment. There is no other.... Within logic or four squares of reason, they don't believe their deputy leader, their Minister of Finance, is going to show up.

Before I was interrupted—I want to be clear—we have a Minister of Finance, who has appeared a handful of times in the House of Commons and who has thrice refused our invitation to the ministry of finance. It is a blatant disrespect to the institutions of democracy. She is asking Canadians to cough up the amount of \$490 billion, and all we want her to do is to explain, for two hours, why.

I am not even casting aspersions with respect to the budget. I am just asking her to come and appear before Parliament.

I would think that all opposition parties would be in favour of hearing from the finance minister for two hours, but evidently not, so the Conservatives will continue to talk about the importance of democracy and protect our institutions, as Conservatives do, against this subversion of democracy by the Minister of Finance and deputy leader.

What is on the list, Mr. Chair? I apologize.

The Chair: We have MP Morantz next, then I have MP Masse, MP Dzerowicz and then MP Chambers.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Perfect.

I think I have made my point with respect to our recalcitrant deputy leader and Minister of Finance, who is unwilling to come to our committee. Although there is virtue signalling that she is going to appear, the reality is that she has time for Liberal insiders. Her own party does not believe she will show up. Otherwise, they would agree to our subamendment.

This can all be solved and we can move ahead right now if the parliamentary secretary says, “I guarantee, on the record, that our Minister of Finance will be here for two hours so we can move forward today.”

The Chair: MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to continue on with the very compelling argument made by my colleague Mr. Lawrence, we're talking about the most important piece of legislation a government can table in any particular year. We're asking for the Finance minister to come to the Standing Committee on Finance to answer questions about her budget for two hours. We can't seem to get that commitment from other members of this committee.

It makes me wonder, and I want to return to this argument, about the omnibus nature of this bill because, as members might recall, I actually read quotes from the Prime Minister during my last meeting. He commented on the nature of omnibus legislation and said essentially that he thought omnibus.... I'm just paraphrasing now because I can't seem to put my hands on the actual quote, but I did read it into the record before.

He said a couple of things. Gone are the days when legislation is not coherently strung together with a consistent theme. Gone are those days when bills are created that have a hodgepodge of every-

thing but the kitchen sink thrown into them. He said that when he was the leader of the Liberal Party running to be Prime Minister. He went on to say that this type of legislation is undemocratic. I agree with him.

What's very alarming to me is that the government should have learned its lesson about this three or four years ago when the budget implementation bill of the day—I think it was 2018—came to this committee and had this innocuous clause buried in it.

Now to be fair, the committee members at that time did speak about it. The Liberal members and the opposition members alike discussed their concerns about this idea of giving the Minister of Justice and Attorney General a power that office had not ever held before in Canadian history. It was the power to reach into the public prosecution's office and to alter the course of a prosecution. It gave a politician that power. That was buried in a budget bill. That should have been its own bill, frankly.

That's why I'm so concerned. What happened? The committee members were kept in the dark. It turned out that there was a hidden agenda. Prime Minister Trudeau had a hidden agenda when that provision was introduced into that particular budget bill, because he knew with that provision he could help out his friends at SNC-Lavalin who were under a very serious—

The Chair: Ms. Chatel, you have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Yes, I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I want to remind the honourable member that we are discussing the motion, and hopefully, it will be adopted. The purpose of the motion is to invite the Deputy Prime Minister to appear before the committee next Tuesday, which she has agreed to do. The motion also seeks to have the committee hear from all the other stakeholders who wish to comment on the bill. The more we delay hearing from them, the more we delay consideration of this important bill.

I want to remind the honourable member that that is the possibility being debated. We would like the Conservative members' agreement, so the committee can meet with the Deputy Prime Minister.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chatel.

Again, we'll do a refocus here. What we are debating right now is the amendment and now the subamendment to the amendment of the main motion, which is that the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18, 2023.

MP Morantz, go ahead.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Chair, with the greatest of respect to Ms. Chatel, I am directly on point with debating the subamendment because the subamendment is about requesting that the finance minister appear before this committee.

As part of that debate, we need to be free at this committee to explain why. That's what I'm doing. I'm explaining why it's so important. I will keep explaining why it's so important, notwithstanding any points of order, interruptions or any tactics any of the other members might have to try to muzzle the Minister of Finance from coming to this committee. That's what is happening here, Mr. Chair.

I will wear it as a badge of honour that members of this committee are trying to interrupt me in making this very important, fundamental case to the functioning of democracy in this Parliament, which is that the finance minister appear at this committee to talk about her own budget.

Getting back to my earlier point, that particular budget implementation bill had a provision about the deferred prosecution agreements. From that, a major scandal for this government ensued. The Prime Minister was found to be saying things like the story in *The Globe* was untrue. Of course, we found out that it was true. We found out that he was in fact pressuring the then-Attorney General to grant his friends at—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There's no relevance of SNC-Lavalin to the subamendment to the amendment to have the minister come before committee.

This is ridiculous. We had to listen to a discussion of eels for many hours. I'm not going to listen to a diatribe on all past things that the Conservatives were not happy about.

If he would like me to reread the amendment that they have proposed, I'm happy to do that. I'd love to hear his comments about their subamendment to the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

We'll go back to MP Morantz.

Again, MP Morantz, we're talking to the subamendment to the amendment to the main motion, which is that the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18, 2023.

MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I am happy to reread the motion into the record for the member, Mr. Chair, but I will not be muzzled in making my case as to why the Minister of Finance should appear, because that is what this subamendment to Mr. Blaikie's amendment specifically speaks to.

What we're talking about here is that the minister be invited to appear for two hours such that "if the Minister of Finance has not appeared by May 18, 2023 amendments to Bill C-47, notwithstanding subparagraph (b)(i), be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11:00 a.m. ET the business day following the Minister appearing at Finance committee for a duration of no less than 2 hours."

That's a very reasonable request, Mr. Chair.

My point is that I'm trying to make the argument, if the members opposite will allow me to, but if they want to continue to interrupt, I'm fine with that too.... They can speak for as long as they like. That's what democracy is about. We talk to each other and, hopeful-

ly, we resolve things. That's why it's called "Parliament", Mr. Chair: We parley.

That's what I'm trying to do, and I'm trying to make the point that this particular provision led to a massive scandal, and that's why these types of bills are problematic. It's not just my saying that: It's the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister said it's undemocratic. He said he wouldn't do it anymore and, like so many things that he says he won't do, he ends up doing them anyway.

We have all these parts of the budget bill that have nothing to do with the budget that really should go through the proper scrutiny of Parliament, be introduced in the House, go up for debate, be voted on by the committee, debated in committee, perhaps amended in the committee and sent back, but no. They're throwing everything but the kitchen sink in here.

I asked the question when the public servants were here, by the way. "Is there any one company that might benefit from any provision in this bill?" Do you know what they said, Mr. Chair?

Nothing.

Let me say that again.

Nothing.

That's the response I got, Mr. Chair. It was very informative.

I just think that it's incumbent on the finance minister to come here. There are very serious questions here.

The finance minister came here in November to talk about the fall economic statement, so here's one of my questions. If she would agree to come to committee, I might ask her this question. She said that in 2027-28 she forecasted a surplus. That was music to the ears of Conservatives. We thought that maybe the Liberals were finally taking fiscal responsibility seriously. They actually forecasted—this is just in November—a \$4.5-billion surplus.

Imagine my surprise—and I'm sure my colleagues were surprised—when the budget showed up five months later. It seemed, by the way, that before the pandemic—and I want to say this, Mr. Chair—a billion dollars seemed like a lot of money. Now, it seems like we're throwing around billions of dollars with reckless abandon, but here we are.

We had a promise of fiscal responsibility: a surplus of four and a half billion dollars by 2027-28. I know the members on this committee are very much aware of that commitment.

Then the budget comes. I flip open to the chart and look at 2027-28, trying to see if maybe it's even better. Maybe they found a way to run an even larger surplus. What did I see? In that same year, a \$14-billion deficit is forecast, with no balance in sight.

This is why this motion is so important. This is why it's so important for the finance minister to come here for the two hours that we're requesting, as stated in this motion. We're asking that provided that if the Minister of Finance has not appeared by May 18

amendments to Bill C-47, notwithstanding subparagraph (b)(1), be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11 a.m. eastern time, the business day following the minister appearing at the finance committee for a duration of no less than two hours.

On this subamendment, I want to make a very important point. If I can put my hands on the motion we had, as the precedent...

Here's an interesting one. There was a motion introduced at the official languages committee. It said:

That, in relation to the consideration of Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts

There are two in particular:

...amendments to Bill C-13 to be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11 a.m. [eastern time] the business day following the last meeting with the ministers and departments.

If my colleagues in the Liberal Party want to argue that they don't want to set a precedent, I have news for them: It's been set. Marc G. Serré, a Liberal member, actually moved this motion. If the members opposite want to make the argument, "Well, we don't want to set a precedent. We don't want to create a condition precedent to the Minister of Finance coming here. That's just not right".... They did it themselves in the transport committee. That motion passed in the transport committee.

We're saying the same thing, namely, submit it to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11 a.m. eastern of the business day following the minister appearing at the finance committee for a duration of no less than two hours.

I don't know what the problem here is, Mr. Chair. It makes me wonder, when the Minister of Finance has only been in the House six times this year. Despite three invitations from this committee, she has ghosted us. She came for one hour last fall and presented a forecast of a surplus into 2027-28. That disappeared, along with her, in the 2023 budget. We need to get on with our task of finding Freeland and passing the subamendment, the amendment and the subamendment, in order to get her here to answer these very important questions.

Now, I think I'm going to take a bit of a break from the microphone, at this point in time, Mr. Chair.

However, I would like to indulge...if I may ask one question of the clerk: Would they be so kind as to add my name back onto the list, in case I have further epiphanies—

The Chair: MP Morantz, I'll put your name back on the list.

There you go.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

The Chair: MP Masse is up next, then MP Dzerowicz, then MP Chambers. I'll just go through the list: Then it's MP Perkins, then MP Morantz again.

MP Masse, congratulations on the Ojibwa national park.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the support of the House.

The Chair: I did a lot of running in that park.

Mr. Brian Masse: Nice. I appreciate that. Thank you for the support we received from all members of all parties. I appreciate it.

I want to intervene briefly as a New Democrat to say that we won't be supporting the subamendment because it is very similar to the amendment before. I know that you've ruled that it's different, which is fine with us, but at the same time it's consistent with the policies of delaying what needs to take place.

For some history here, it was the Harper administration that started bringing in ministers for one hour. That was not the case before. The tradition of the past has been that ministers come here for two hours.

I don't know why a minister wouldn't want to come for two hours, actually. My experience in this format has been that ministers, once they know their file, actually can exceed almost any opposition member's attempts to do certain things in many ways because they have the last word and the control of the mike. I don't know why the government would be hesitant with two hours.

However, I do understand where it comes from. In fact, there was a time when parliamentary secretaries weren't at committee. That was brought in by the Paul Martin administration. It was consistently handled...and continued all the way through the Harper administration to the one we have now.

As well, on riders.... I come from an area, as you know, Mr. Chair, close to the American border, so we call them riders to a bill. Those are things that are added into a bill. That was originally done, that I know of.... I know that in the history of Canada it's been done before. That was done through the Martin administration on a couple of issues, like immigration and so forth. Then it became a regular practice during the Harper administration. It became routine. In fact, many of those things that were added later on lost court cases. It became quite extreme. In fact, they used closure over 100 times in the House of Commons with one hour of debate.

For us, we want to see this get moving. I remember when the current Prime Minister supported the minority Harper administration over a hundred times without getting amendments to bills.

As New Democrats, we came here to make Parliament work. We want to see this get done, especially for dental care. My riding has some of the highest child poverty in Canada and some of the highest numbers of single mothers, as well. You may not think that Windsor, being right on the Detroit border, would have these types of consequences because of the type of wealth that we do sometimes have, but the reality is that we also have a significant issue over poverty. We're eager to see these results because we're also going to be moving into seniors and persons with disabilities.

One of the first motions I lost in the House of Commons back in 2002 was to create a bill that would actually have environmental contaminants and human health looked at. We have such a high rate of disabilities in my region because of the industrialization and the pollution. It's not only from our auto industry, which we have done ourselves, but also from the Ohio River valley, the toxic streams and rivers, and the Great Lakes, where we haven't treated it properly. There is a high rate of thyroid cancer. We actually outperform in the number of children born with disabilities and so forth.

We won't be supporting this. We hope the government finds two hours for the minister to come here. At the same time, I don't think the most important thing for Canadians is a few hours here at committee. I don't remember if, in any of the eight elections I've been in for... I've done my filibuster at a couple of committees and I've seen this come and go at different times, but I don't remember many people raising that as a serious issue for them and their families at this point in time.

I'm hopeful that we'll get this going because there's a lot of work to get done. I do respect the fact that they want the minister here for two hours. I wish, though, that they wouldn't have brought this practice in because we probably wouldn't be here today at this debate if that were the case.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Masse.

Now I will go to MP Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thanks so much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to say that the impression one can get if one's listening to this filibuster is that the minister has been invited to the finance committee a number of times and that she hasn't appeared.

The minister has appeared at this committee at least four times during this Parliament. She has come here for every BIA as well as other key government legislation, and the clerk started this meeting by indicating to us that she is on record indicating that she will appear before us on May 16. She didn't indicate for how long, but she's never been here for less than an hour, so I should think that that's important to state.

I'd also like to state that it doesn't matter which committee you're on; it is very typical for ministers to be invited a number of times and quite often. It is not typical for ministers to accept every single invitation, but I don't want anyone to think that the minister has not appeared before this committee, that she has not appeared a number of times before this committee. She has. She has appeared before every important legislation—sorry, I want to say all legislation is

important—but she has attended for every BIA and other important government legislation.

I also want to reiterate that we do agree with the amendment by MP Daniel Blaikie:

That the Minister of Finance be invited to be here for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023.

We very much agree with that, and again, as I mentioned, we don't know how long the minister will stay, but we know that she has never been here for less than one hour. In fact, I have been here, Mr. Chair, at this committee when she has spoken for more than an hour. She has been here for more than an hour.

I also want to address Mr. Morantz's claim that he is being muzzled with our points of order. I don't think that we're trying to muzzle him or anybody else in any way.

We've heard quite a long speech around eels for many hours, which has absolutely no relevance to the BIA or to the federal budget 2023. We want to make sure that we keep the arguments on point and to the subamendment, the amendment, the BIA or federal budget 2023.

The last thing I want to reiterate is because, again, Mr. Morantz keeps on talking about how there's a whole slew of things in the BIA that have no relevance to federal budget 2023. I want to state one more time for the record that every measure in the BIA appears in the text of federal budget 2023, so they are absolutely relevant. We are not just putting things in there. I don't want Canadians to think that we're trying to fool them in any way. I think that we are trying to be accountable. Part of the reason we want to send it to various committees of key subject matter experts is to make sure that subject matter experts are on it and that they give feedback to this committee.

With that, I also would like to state that we do not support that subamendment, and I'm really hoping that we can move on and get back to hearing from witnesses on the BIA, then hear from our Minister of Finance and move forward with federal budget 2023.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

Now we go to MP Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate everybody's comments so far.

I agree with Ms. Dzerowicz. The minister has been here three or four times, however that hasn't been on invitation of the committee. That has been because the minister has to appear to advance legislation through the committee.

In fact, the minister has been invited on three separate occasions: twice for 90 minutes, once for 120 minutes, and I believe one other time for the inflation study, which has an open invitation for three hours, i.e., for 180 minutes. The minister has been invited to come to the committee for 480 minutes and the committee is supposed to accept 60 minutes next week to satisfy the number of outstanding requests. The only reason the minister is appearing is to advance the budget legislation.

I actually think that maybe we've been a little unfair to the Minister of Finance. After having listened to my colleague's interventions, I think maybe the minister actually does want to come. I think the minister wants to come for two hours but it looks like more and more now that the Prime Minister's Office doesn't want the deputy finance minister to appear before this committee often.

I actually think the minister wants to appear, so maybe instead of "finding Freeland", it should be "free Freeland" because clearly the minister and Deputy Prime Minister...

I have an incredible amount of respect for the Deputy Prime Minister. She is in a very tough position: inflation is raging three times over the target. She's obviously very accomplished. She's very smart. Maybe the Prime Minister's Office is worried about leadership politics starting to enter the fray.

The Prime Minister is being attacked from multiple angles. We have other cabinet ministers starting their leadership campaigns. Maybe the Prime Minister's Office is trying to prevent the de facto leader of the upcoming leadership race from getting more exposure. Or maybe, someone on another leadership campaign has convinced the Prime Minister's Office to not allow the finance minister to appear before committee.

I have full belief in my colleague from Windsor, Brian Masse. I believe he said it best, that ministers, when they know their file, can bat around any questions from any parliamentarian here quite easily. The minister has done that on a number of occasions. She's quite capable of it.

Now having listened to the debate, I think I owe the finance minister an apology. I think she wants to come here but she's not able to come. Maybe it's her who is being prevented from appearing before a committee for a whole bunch of reasons that have nothing to do with the budget bill.

I would submit to the committee that there are also multiple ways to resolve this impasse. I agree that we should start to talk to stakeholders. We could have done that if we struck the clause-by-clause part of the motion in the original motion by Mr. Beech. I also accept or support the subamendment by Mr. Blaikie. It's something I've advocated for here, but there is that saying, "Fool me once, fool me twice, fool me three times".

Again, perhaps our frustrations on the committee as members of the opposition have been misguided. I think, perhaps, we should be encouraging the Prime Minister's Office to free Minister Freeland and allow her to come to committee, share her talents with us and defend her government's record. She's very capable of doing that.

I don't know why the Prime Minister's Office is not allowing the Deputy Prime Minister to appear at a finance committee meeting

for more than an hour. I think they're very concerned about the leadership politics that are starting to enter the discourse.

I have full faith that the minister wants to come. I hope she will be allowed to do so. I think we could give some comfort to the committee if she could confirm the time when she is available. I suspect that this will also have to be vetted by the Prime Minister's Office.

You know, we hearken back to the days of the controlling Harper PMO. Well, let me tell you, there has not been a Prime Minister's Office more controlling than the one we currently have. They actually vet every single chief of staff hiring. That didn't happen in the last government. For all the talk about Prime Minister Harper's PMO being so controlling, there isn't anything that gets done in this town without the okay from the Prime Minister's Office.

I'm actually more imploring those individuals and the staff members of the government to plead with the Prime Minister's Office that the Minister of Finance be allowed to shine at this committee and answer questions from parliamentarians and from Canadians. I believe there are multiple ways to broach this impasse. I look forward to other thoughts from my committee members.

I will end on a point about the subamendment. I do agree that it does create a challenging precedent, but that precedent was created by the languages committee, which was supported by Liberal members at the time. I appreciate the chair's ruling that this subamendment is admissible. It is not substantially similar to the one previous. The other previous motion included asking multiple ministers to appear. It is unclear to me, as a member of this committee, what the will of the committee was when we voted that down. Was it that we didn't want both ministers to appear together? Was it that we didn't want the finance minister to appear? Was it that we didn't want the Minister of Public Safety to appear? It's unclear to me what the will of the committee was when we voted that down.

In my view, the amendment is admissible. I think the chair agrees with that, on the advice of the clerk. I'm happy to support this subamendment. I look forward to seeing the Minister of Finance here next week for two hours when we break this impasse, but we could move to committee study with stakeholders on Thursday through a few different paths. One, we agree to the subamendment. If that's not going to happen, two, we get confirmation from the finance minister that she will be here for two hours, after she is approved to do so from the PMO. Or three, we actually strike the requirement to move to clause-by-clause starting on May 18.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll pass the floor to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chambers.

I have MP Perkins and then MP Morantz.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess I'm in agreement with MP Chambers on the issue of the evolution of "finding Freeland" to "freeing Freeland", but I want to start by speaking to the question of whether or not everything in this bill has to do with the country's finances. I appreciate that some members may think that, but if you bear with me, I'll just read you the sections of this omnibus bill to let you know—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I want to correct for the record that I had indicated that every measure in the BIA appears in the text of the budget. That's just to let you know.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you. I appreciate the clarification.

It's clear I'm drawing a huge crowd here today, so I'll continue.

The budget implementation act, tabled in Parliament on March 28, amends the following items. It amends the Income Tax Act and other legislation. It has provisions around the GST and the HST. A number of these are directly related, obviously, to the country's finances, but not all of them are, in my view.

The next part is "Amendments to the Excise Act, the Excise Act, 2001 and the Air Travellers Security Charge Act". Of course, the Air Travellers Security Charge Act is a critical element of the country's finances. Obviously, it's important to consumers, but I'm not sure that it is part of a budget.

Division 1 of this legislation makes changes to the Excise Act and Excise Act, 2001 with regard to alcohol products. We know that's related to the automatic escalator provision that the Liberals imposed in the budget on all the libations that Canadians consume that have an escalator attached to inflation. We, as Conservatives, were demanding that the escalator be suspended or removed, and the government has changed its position and limited the increase to a mere 2%, so all of those increases that you saw on April 1 in a lot of our liquor boards across the country are thanks in part to this change.

Division 2 says, "Air Travellers Security Charge Act (Charge Rates)".

Part 4, as it's put in, has various measures and amendments to the Bank Act and amendments to private sector pension plans.

Division 3, as it's called, has "Measures Related to Money Laundering and to Digital Assets and Other Measures".

Division 4 is "Preferential Tariff Programs for Developing Countries".

Division 5 is "Removal of Most-Favoured-Nation Tariff Treatment for Belarus and Russia". I think that's something that's long overdue.

Division 6 is "Non-application of Sections 27 and 27.1 of the Bank of Canada Act".

Division 7 says that this is making amendments. They're actually not amendments. Division 7 has to do with the creation of a brand new act called the Canada innovation corporation act, and that act has a whole bunch of provisions.

Normally, this would be a separate piece of legislation to go before Parliament so that it could be scrutinized on its own when you create a new multi-billion dollar Crown corporation, but apparently buried in this omnibus bill is a series of changes, or creation that includes everything from the designation of the minister, which I understand is the Minister of Industry.... "Continuation and status", as they're called as part of this act, have been created by this.

It outlines every act of Parliament and the purpose and function of creating this Canada innovation corporation. It sets out the board, the chief executive officer and employee structures. It has what it calls miscellaneous provisions, restrictions on directives, disclosure of information to federal institutions and payments out of a consolidated revenue fund—because it wouldn't be a new Liberal program if it didn't have lots of taxpayer money going into it. There's a financial year and establishing that, requiring it to have quarterly financial reports and annual reports. It also has transitional plans, as every act of Parliament does that changes an existing act.

Division 8 is "Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act", which amends the Canada Health Transfer.

Division 9 is "Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act", which deals with equalization and territorial financing.

Division 10 is "Economic Sanctions". Again, economic sanctions aren't necessarily what you would see as standard in a budget bill. Needless to say, we need upgrading to have more teeth in the ability to have more powerful economic sanctions against the rogue state Russia and its illegal war, but the budget bill is being used to make those changes, rather than a separate piece of legislation, which would be the norm.

Division 11 is "Privileges and Immunities (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) Act". Apparently, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, other than paying our fees, is a budget element. Generally, that act would be amended on its own.

This is why we call it an omnibus act. It's because it's amending lots of acts that have nothing to do with the country's finances. What they have to do is.... Since they were mentioned in a written document somewhere, that apparently justifies putting them in an act all together.

Division 12 says "Service Fees Act".

There are amendments in division 13 to the Canada pension plan.

Division 14 amends the Department of Employment and Social Development Act, another act where you could do that separately under that act as a separate piece of legislation, not in a budget bill.

There are amendments to the Canada Labour Code. I know my colleagues will be shocked to learn that a budget bill is used to amend the labour code. It's an omnibus bill at a classic definition if there ever was one.

Not to be outdone by Canada Labour Code changes, division 16 amends the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Of course, we all know that the Immigration and Refugee Act claims and refugee protection are always classic things included in a budget. We always think of the money in and the money out that a government spends and that amending the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is a critical part of whether or not the government balances its budget or not.

Division 17, again, not to be outdone by the previous one, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act claims and refugee protection, division 17 amends the same thing, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act sponsorship applications. Sponsoring immigrants is clearly not a budget item, but it's thrown in this act because it's mentioned in a written document tabled in the House.

Division 18 concerns the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants Act. Well, well, well, more amendments. More amendments to how we regulate and manage immigration consultants in our system. There is nothing to do with revenue in or revenue out, but that's apparently a budget item under this government.

Then it's amendments to the Citizenship Act. Yes, of course. What we say and how somebody gets sworn in as a citizen is always something that comes top of mind when we're talking about a budget.

Then there's the the Yukon Act, division 20.

Division 21 is the oceans protection plan; now we're going to have some fun. As members know, in addition to my afternoon and evening appearances at this committee, I sit more formally on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and I'm the vice-chair of the industry committee. I was getting questions even earlier today about why speak to elvers? There are amendments here to the Oceans Act, which is clearly an issue the government seems to think merits budget attention.

Last time I checked, elvers... As a reminder for those who weren't here the other day, they're baby eels. They're not as cute as seals, but they're worth an awful lot more—help me here—\$5,000 a kilogram they're sold for. We have massive amounts of poaching and illegal fishing going on, but the oceans protection plan is being amended here through a budget bill. It's not money in, money out, but yet more amendments to acts of Parliament unrelated to our financing.

As an aside, I got yet another email this morning from the elver fishermen complaining about the minister's statement yesterday that she thought that arresting and seizing 123 kilograms of elvers was great enforcement. That seizure of elvers represents one poacher's day on one river since the closure has happened, so it's not really great enforcement when there are thousands of poachers who have caught in some estimates over 10,000 kilograms of illegal elvers.

In fact, yesterday found in the Tusket River in Digby were 30 pounds of dead elvers because the rocket scientist who was poach-

ing elvers didn't realize that things you take out of the ocean, if you want them to stay alive, actually have to stay in water. So that's sitting there. The information from the poacher was given to the RCMP, which was the context in which I was talking about elvers before, because we were dealing with a subamendment on the appearance of the public safety minister before this committee and how he should be held accountable for the fact that the police forces of Canada, the RCMP, are not enforcing the law on these issues.

I won't go on too much more on fisheries, although I note MP Beech is fascinated by everything, including the importance of our lobster fishery.

Division 22 is the Canada Transportation Act, which is yet more relevance that comes top of mind when I think of a budget.

Division 23 is air travel complaints. We know how important it is and how bad it's gotten for Canadians in terms of their air travel service and the growing complaints. It is a good thing that there are more provisions being put forward by the government to improve the ability of Canadians not only to get answers, but to get paid when airlines cancel their flights and do things that are against the interest of the consumer. That is a good thing, but air travel complaints should be a bill on its own. Because of its importance, it should not be buried in this massive omnibus bill.

The bill makes changes to the Customs Act. I know this is getting dizzying, but there are a few more pages of acts that are left here to read out.

There's the National Research Council Act. This is a granting council. Some of you may not know it gets a lot of money—\$1.6 billion or \$1.8 billion a year. An additional \$1 billion was given to it in last year's budget. It makes amendment to the act of the National Research Council. You don't need to change the act of the National Research Council if you're simply giving it more money. If you are changing or altering its mandate and its role, this omnibus bill is making changes to that. It's not to the flow of money. The flow of money would be in a budget bill, but changes to the National Research Council in terms of its act and its mandate should be on its own in another act.

There are changes to the Patent Act. Wow, I always think of changing the Patent Act in a budget bill. I always think that's a money item. It is a money item for those who have patents or for those who are filing patents.

I checked through this. There have been studies by the industry committee recommending that this country and this government adopt a patent box. It's a preferential tax rate for those who have patents to encourage the development and ownership of intellectual property. When I checked through division 26, which is on the Patent Act, I did not see the government creating a patent box.

An hon. member: Really?

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, I didn't. Unusually, I didn't see it spending more money. I saw just standard amendments.

Division 27 is on the Food and Drugs Act for natural health products. Again, there's no money in or out; it's not additional money. It's a change to an act of Parliament. This is why we call these omnibus bills, in spite of the objections from some.

Division 28 is Food and Drug Act amendments again. It's for cosmetic testing. I automatically think of cosmetic testing as an issue you would have in a budget bill since it involves whether or not we have a balanced budget. Oh, wait. No, it doesn't.

Division 29 is the "Dental Care Measures Act". There are a whole bunch of things in here. It's part of the costly coalition's agreement to have a dental care act. I'd say the fourth party in the House, who signs this NDP costly coalition, allowed itself to be sold short on this since, in essence, it's just a tax rebate. It's not actually a dental plan, as Canadians would come to think of it.

Division 31 is the "Royal Style and Titles Act". That always come to mind when I talk about a budget. In fact, my understanding on the royal style of the Royal Style and Titles Act 2023 is that this extensive budget measure that obviously is thought of as a key budget component puts a snowflake on the crown of the sovereign for his symbol in Canada.

I always think of snowflakes as uniquely Canadian. I don't think snowflakes are anywhere else. There are more pejorative terms that snowflake is used for. It might be a snowflake effort to make the crown more politically correct and woke, but I don't think putting a snowflake on the crown—on a printed crown, not on a real crown because it would melt; it's a symbol of a crown.... I always think of that as a budget item.

In the titles act, they changed the title to the "King" of some of the things that we grant the king in Canada.

We have a new king. I'm sure lots of Canadians watched the pageantry of Canada's head of state being crowned—an important period in time. There were no snowflakes in London, at the time—not that I could see falling. However, apparently, if you live in Minnesota, Colorado or Washington.... Maybe they have snowflakes, too, but apparently our government thinks it's unique to Canada and should therefore be put on the symbol of the Crown. Obviously, it's an essential budget item.

A BeaverTail could have been put on. Yes. There has been some debate by well-known Liberal Warren Kinsella this past weekend, on Twitter, about whether or not people should line up for Beaver-Tails, a style of deep-fried dough with sugar that is quintessential to Canadians, and quintessential to Ottawa, too.

An act respecting the Royal Style and Titles Act, 2023....I mentioned this.

Division 32 is the "Canada Growth Fund". That's sort of an oxymoron. It's another one of these programs the government creates that have mediocre results. There's one, it seems.... I live in danger of fall economic statements and budgets. Every time there's a budget, there seems to be a need to create another multi-billion dollar

agency that is as effective as the Infrastructure Bank, which, I understand, still hasn't made any significant contributions to Canada's infrastructure. The Canada Infrastructure Bank was supposed to attract all this private sector money.

The Canada growth fund is supposed to create yet another fund focused on.... Well, I don't think the minister quite knew, when she was before the Senate committee and was asked about it. She still doesn't know, but it will have its own act, its own fund, its own board, and lots of bureaucrats around to theoretically dole out Canadian money for some sort of growth. It's not quite clear, but maybe it's a growth in paper—a growth in the size of government, which we know has gone up by 80,000 people since 2015.

If you recall—those who tuned into my first intervention on this—in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, they have, in three years, grown from 10,000 to 15,000 people.

An hon. member: That's good growth.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's probably what the growth fund is aimed at: getting at more government growth like that. Apparently, they needed a fund to help them grow the fisheries department from 10,000 to 15,000. By the way, over 1,000 of those jobs were, shockingly, in Ottawa, bringing the grand total of HR people in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to over 832, and over 1,000 people in its finance department. With this kind of growth in people, there are a lot of paycheques to manage. You need to have more HR and finance people to process all of those additional people.

Division 33 is "Legislation Related to Financial Institutions". I know division 34.... Everybody here will agree that I always expect, in a budget bill, to see Criminal Code amendments. Criminal Code amendments are essential for balancing the budget in Canada. That's why, apparently, this omnibus bill thinks that is directly related to the budget on the Criminal Code. There are amendments to the Employment Insurance Act in division 35 and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 in division 36. Division 37 has amendments to another act, the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation Act. Now, you may say, "That's a budget item", but why isn't that its own...if this government opposed, as it said in 2015, all omnibus bills?

We're not speaking to whether or not previous governments used omnibus bills, because we're now at eight years and there are only so many years one can claim, "The dog ate my homework—it's Stephen Harper's fault I did an omnibus bill". I don't know why Stephen Harper is responsible for this omnibus bill. Apparently, the Liberals can't think on their own and have to say that Stephen Harper made them do it. It's sort of like—I'm going to show my age again—Flip Wilson in the seventies, when the devil made him do it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

In this evolution of moving from “finding Freeland” to “freeing Freeland”, I sure think it would be interesting to understand why the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation needs to be in this, as opposed to its own act.

Let's talk about the employment insurance board of appeal. This is a new body. I know that members will be shocked to learn that the Liberals have created yet another new body.

I've lost track already of all of the things I've mentioned here, from the CEIC to the Canada growth fund, to.... Well, I'm losing track.

The employment insurance board of appeal is a new board that they've created. Apparently, you can't pass by a budget without at least a half a dozen new bodies and agencies.

Also, of course, I always think—always—when I think of a budget, of amendments to the Canada Elections Act. It's essential that a budget have Canada Elections Act changes in it in order to ensure that it runs 130 billion dollars' worth of debt in the next five years.

There is no pretext of a balanced budget, as MP Morantz said, in the economic statement.

In the three times that the minister has been invited since the economic statement, she has blown this committee off, and that's one of the reasons why, if you'll forgive me, we are skeptical that the commitment that she will appear, as genuine as it is from government members, that the minister herself, who only showed up for six times, will appear—

The Chair: I have a point of order from MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Just on a quick point of order, I want to thank the member for mentioning the EI appeal board. Based on his comments the other day, I thought that maybe he had misread and thought it was an “eel appeal board”, so I'm glad to see that he is reading the legislation properly and that we're talking about things that are actually in the bill.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that, and I am sure the employment insurance appeal board will go after “eel-legal” things in the act.

Mr. Chair, these are just some of the reasons that this is a huge piece of legislation and that we need to see the minister for two hours. I noticed that the government members have refused to commit to two hours.

I'll just remind members and, for the sake of the interpreters, the minister's mandate letter was signed by the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau on December 16, 2021. It says here on Prime Minister's Office letterhead:

Dear Minister Freeland:

Thank you for continuing to serve Canadians as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

If I go to the bottom of page 2 of that letter, if you'll bear with me, I'll just read these very important words that the Prime Minister instructed the Minister of Finance to follow:

The success of this Parliament will require Parliamentarians, both in the House of Commons and the Senate, to work together across all parties to get big things done for Canadians.

As I said last time, it doesn't say big and little things, just big things. The big things and big government are the things that we get done. We don't worry about passports or approving health cards so that we don't have a shortage of pilots. We don't worry about the little things like immigration approvals while we now have 2.2 million and visas and processes. We don't worry about those little things. We just worry about the big things done for Canadians. It's very impressive language.

I've always maintained, by the way, that the first priority of any government is to look after the ante up at the poker game. If you're a municipal government, and you're not providing adequate fire service, don't bother me with bike lanes until you've got adequate fire service. It's the same for the federal government. Unless you're delivering the basic services that Canadians expect, all those other nice-to-do things that are contained in the 42 or so acts that this thing either creates or amends should be done first.

The Prime Minister goes on to say:

I expect you to maintain constructive relationships with your Opposition Critics and coordinate any legislation with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I assume she did that with this bill, or we wouldn't have it here today.

This is the really important part of this mandate letter from the Prime Minister to the Minister of Finance. This is a critical part about what we're talking about today, which is ministerial accountability:

As Minister, you are accountable to Parliament both individually, for your style of leadership and the performance of your responsibilities, and collectively, in support of our Ministry and decisions taken by Cabinet.

It then goes onto reference this document from 2015 called “Open and Accountable Government”. The letter continues that this document “sets out the rules and core principles both in standards of conduct expected of you as Minister of Finance and your office.”

If you do as the Prime Minister says.... The Prime Minister says here:

I expect you to familiarize yourself with this document, which outlines my expectations for each member of the Ministry.

Just recall from that document that it says that ministers must be available to answer questions in Parliament, and that is the root of the question here, that MP Blaikie's original amendment and the subamendment propose two hours, not one hour, and we can't seem to get a commitment on the two hours. Two hours is a small price to pay. We do know that the minister is busy.

I'll give you an example of the minister's recent schedule this past weekend. The minister this past weekend had two very important appointments, very important appointments. This past weekend, she was at the Shaw Centre not far from here, and I suggested in the previous meeting that perhaps we reconvene this committee at the Shaw Centre in order to give the minister a greater amount of convenience to show up, because she was at the Shaw Centre for the weekend. The minister had on the first day of her meetings there a keynote conversation, a fireside chat, so to speak, with Hillary Rodham Clinton, former senator and first lady. I know that it was a big and important meeting, because I'm told by the media reports that the Minister of Finance was almost moved to tears by this.

I'll tell you what moves me to tears. It's a \$490-billion budget, the biggest in Canadian history, other than during COVID. It's a \$490-billion budget that never projects a balanced budget and says we're going to spend \$130 billion and add more to the debt, so that the two Trudeaus combined, senior and junior, will have added \$1.1 trillion in debt. That's what moves me to tears. It's that and thinking about the future generations of Canadians who are going to have to pay for that long beyond any of us are even still here on this earth.

That was an important hour-long conversation. It was probably equivalent to the only amount of time the minister is willing to spend at this committee. Apparently, she's willing to spend an hour here. It was said she spent at least an hour. I think the proper pronunciation in the past is that she spent a maximum of an hour in this committee.

We're simply asking that the time that she gave for two panels at the convention on the weekend be allocated to her \$490 billion budget. The second panel, which I'm sure was just riveting, had a big crowd. I don't think it made her cry, but it made me cry just reading the title because of its "wokeness". It was called "Made-in-Canada: Innovation for middle class jobs and a cleaner economy".

I'm sure there was great insight in that. Insights like that led party members of the Liberal Party to pass a resolution—I'm sorry. They defeated a resolution. They did not pass a resolution. They defeated a resolution, perhaps bravely put forward by some Liberal Party members, that they should have a plan at some date to balance the budget.

The collective Liberals in the room—including, presumably, all of the caucus members here—said, "Absolutely not. We don't ever want to balance the budget. We think it's perfectly fine to spend forever and ever on the credit card."

I'd love to see the way each one of those Liberals runs their own personal house finances. I'm sure that when the bank calls and says, "You owe us money on your mortgage or your credit card," they say, "Don't worry about it. I don't need to worry about that. We can keep doing that. Increase my limit. Just increase my limit."

The \$130 billion...that's a big number. We're now in the position that by the end of this five-year projection in this budget, the debt servicing costs alone are going to be more than what the government transfers to the provinces in health care. It's more important to

pay interest to bankers by increasing the debt for those inputs with little outputs.

Is your health care any better?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Are your roads any better?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Are your passport abilities any better? Is your employment insurance any better? Are any of these things any better for Canadians?

Better yet, is your cost of living better?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't think your cost of living is better. I think we continue to have record inflation rates. People are struggling. I hear it every day, as every member of Parliament does.

I would remind the minister what the Prime Minister said, which is you need to answer questions. I've heard questions around this issue of two hours. Wow, that's a lot of time, two hours, I have to tell you.

Ministers don't always necessarily come, apparently. I sit on two other committees. I can tell you that Minister Champagne and Minister Murray have come to those committees every time we've asked. They've never missed a meeting. They've never, ever missed a meeting.

In fact, on the two-hour issue, Minister Champagne has agreed to come to the industry committee to talk for two hours, which will not be a problem for him. It won't be a problem for him on the Volkswagen contract. Unfortunately, for those of you watching today, you won't be able to watch it because the government only agreed to it if we could do it in camera. What that means is in secret. They don't want to defend the contract, but he's agreed to come for two hours. He's a very amiable guy.

I agree with MP Morantz. I had hope yesterday, when I saw the sixth appearance of the minister in the House this year, in our "finding Freeland" effort. It was like the black bears had come out of hibernation. I thought, let's see if she's there today. That will be good. Maybe she won't be. That would be seven. That would be a record, because I don't think the minister has actually been there for two days in a row. This would be some sort of new record for the Minister of Finance.

On the issue of ministerial accountability, which this is about, just to help the translators follow, I began the last meeting by helping members of this committee understand the importance of these two hours by outlining a document from the Treasury Board of Canada. That's the government department that is responsible for deciding on the actual spending. Once the budget lays out the spending, Treasury Board does spend the actual money.

The document is entitled “Meeting the Expectations of Canadians: Review of the Responsibilities and Accountabilities of Ministers and Senior Officials”. I began reading from this excellent document, and I will now take up where I left off the other night. I know that members have been anxiously waiting for me to continue this part of my presentation.

In order to ensure that the translators can follow, I will start on page 5, where I left off. I won't go through the first four pages, although they were very enlightening, about accountability and ministers' roles. I will start off at the bottom of page 5 with the section about the goal of an accountable regime. I'm not keen on the word “regime”, but maybe it applies to this government. It's more a regime than it is a government of the people.

This section of the important Treasury Board document begins, “The government must be accountable for both the policies it sets and the means by which it implements them.” That's sort of at the heart of Mr. Blaikie's motion. That's why we want the minister there. “However, the area of particular concern in the current context”—the context of this document—“is the responsibility and accountability of ministers and senior officials for matters of financial administration and management in policy implementation.” I'll read that again, because that is what this budget implementation bill is about. The context is the “responsibility and accountability of ministers and senior officials for matters of financial administration and management in policy implementation.”

A budget is the culmination, the coming together, of both financial administration and policy development and direction. That's why that's important. “This report, therefore, focusses on responsibility and accountability for financial administration. In this regard, the accountability regime under our system of responsible government must do the following [things]”. Those things are in bullet points.

I am tempted, every time “ministerial” or “accountability” comes up, to say that I should spell those words for folks, because I'm not sure they're getting them. We may have to get to that in this discussion, but for now I'll go to the first bullet point under what is set out by the Treasury Board. They are to “provide assurance to Parliament”—to Parliament—“and Canadians of the government's proper use of lawful authorities and public resources”.

A budget implementation bill is at the heart of providing assurances to Parliament and Canadians of the government's proper use of lawful authorities and public resources. This is what a budget bill is about. You come before Parliament. You get questioned before Parliament on how you're going to spend citizens' money. That's why we need her here for only two hours in “freeing Freeland”. I know the freeing Freeland exercise, because I'm sure in the “finding Freeland” effort, with the minister attending the House yesterday, she wants to be free from these shackles of PMO control in order to defend a budget that makes me cry but that I assume makes her proud. I'm not sure why never balancing the budget would make her proud, but it seems to make this particular minister proud to never balance the budget.

It's pretty easy in a cabinet to be the finance minister if the only word you say to your cabinet colleagues is “yes”. The hardest part of the finance minister's job is actually saying “no”, just like it is to

your children: No, you can't do that; just because your friend jumped off the roof, it doesn't mean that you should. These are the things parents say to their kids, right? Apparently, we never say those things in the current Liberal cabinet. We say things like, yes, you can have and create yet another ministry.

I know that ISED, as it's called, the industry department, only has about \$16 billion in expenditure this year, but apparently they needed more.

They needed to create two more mediocre agencies that would have the same performance as the Infrastructure Bank.

The second item here says, “In this regard, the accountability...under our...responsible government” includes that you “must do the following” things. You must “reinforce all parties' compliance with established legal requirements and management policies and practices”.

We know how diligently the Liberal government has followed that because we know how many sole-source contracts to friends this government has given out. It clearly reinforces “compliance with established legal requirements and management” to the point they believe that compliance and meeting legal requirements is such an essential part of the genetics of this cabinet that they continue to apologize in the House for giving sole-source contracts to friends and to campaign managers who they used to work with, and other close friends.

Then there's McKinsey. We've spoken about that before. A \$490 billion budget means that, if the minister appears for two hours, it would be a \$250 billion hour-long appearance. If she appears for the full two hours, that's \$490 billion that her appearance will cost the taxpayers. Like I've said before, and I'll say it again, those rates would even make McKinsey blush. Those are extensive, high billing rates. I'm sure McKinsey would be willing to take the minister on, in her post-ministerial life, into a new role to help coach them on how to get such high billing rates for their work and performance.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*] Mr. Bains.

Mr. Perkins: I was just reminded of the current Minister of Industry's predecessor, the “minister for lowering cellphone rates”, Mr. Bains, who before the ink was even dry on his two-year cooling off period after leaving Parliament went to work for the highest-cost cellphone provider in the world—Rogers—as the fellow in charge of their government relations. The minister was responsible for reducing cellphone rates. As we know, when he left before the last election, Rogers had the highest rates in the world. I guess the reward for such incredible performance of a minister is a nice, cushy job in the Bloor and Church office of Rogers. I'm sure he has a beautiful view of the Toronto skyline out that window. He gets to oversee the communications.

I'll remind you that he went from being a vice-chair at CIBC, which is one of Canada's largest banks—I'm sure it was not paying a minimum wage—to now at Rogers. I can only imagine what he got paid by Rogers within days of his “conflict of interest ink” drying on his two-year waiting period. I can only imagine what he got paid. Perhaps his pay would even make McKinsey blush, but it certainly wouldn't make the Minister of Finance blush at the amount she charges.

Under the Treasury Board's “Review of the Responsibilities and Accountabilities of Ministers and Senior Officials”, the third item on the top of page six is—and bear with me, this won't take long. I only have about 50 pages more—to “promote a culture and practice of continuous improvement of governance and administration in the Public Service.”

I guess that's why we had a public service strike: the promotion of a culture and practice of continuous improvement of governance and administration. I think the only improvement we've seen is 80,000 new jobs. Having more gets you less—I think that's the slogan now of the Treasury Board minister. Perhaps she should also be called before this committee. Perhaps we might move a subamendment at some time on that to understand why the Treasury Board minister thinks it's so important for the federal government to grow by 80,000 people since this government was elected.

On the top of page 6 it says, “The accountability regime must therefore be marked by at least three core features”. This is critical in ministerial accountability. Number one is “well-defined roles and responsibilities, where those with authority have the capacity to carry out their duties”. I'm presuming that the ministers have the capacity to carry on their duties even though, since January, there have only been six appearances.

You know, it's sort of like Groundhog Day and waiting for the groundhog to come out. In my riding, we actually bring out a lobster in Shelburne County. It's a lobster we bring out that shows its shadow. Unlike the groundhog, no matter what the lobster predicts, we throw the lobster in a pot and eat it. We don't put it back in.

The best lobsters in the world are from the south shore and western shore of Nova Scotia, the winter fishery, which only has a few weeks left, by the way, if you're interested in some of the best lobster in the world. Then it moves on to the summer lobster, which are good but they're not as good.

The second point under accountability is that the regime must therefore be marked by at least three core features. It says a credible process of rendering an account where those with responsibility answer for their performance—let me spell that a-n-s-w-e-r—answer for their performance against the standard of what they were expected to do.

How are we doing on that, and how can we ask the minister, if the minister isn't willing to come for two hours, about why in the fall economic statement 2022, which she signed and tabled in Parliament, the budget projection is for a \$4.5 billion surplus in 2027? Actually it projects for this year coming up, 2022-23, a deficit of \$30.6 billion, but lo and behold, in this document only six months later, and in this massive omnibus bill, the result of that is

that the Minister of Finance is projecting a \$43 billion deficit this year, in only six months.

The Chair: MP Perkins, could you just mark the point that you're at right now because we're going to be suspending and we'll be back after QP and votes.

Thank you.

- (1315) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1615)

The Chair: Members, we are back.

Looking at the list, MP Perkins had the floor. Then I have MP Morantz, MP Lawrence and MP Morantz again.

MP Perkins, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to be back after the question period break. I was pleased to see that, in the House of Commons in question period, the minister who was answering my questions about our subject at hand pronounced “elvers” correctly. That made me happy.

For those who are just joining us, we're having a discussion about a motion by MP Beech, that's been amended by MP Blaikie, to have the Minister of Finance appear for two hours before clause-by-clause. That was subsequently amended again, specifically striking, as I recall, after Mr. Blaikie's paragraph (h), so that it would now read as follows:

h) That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours...provided that, if the Minister of Finance has not appeared by May 18, 2023 amendments to Bill C-47, notwithstanding subparagraph (b)(i), be submitted to the clerk in both official languages no later than 11:00 a.m. ET the business day following the Minister appearing at Finance committee for a duration of no less than 2 hours.

The budget implementation act, Bill C-47, amends 51—count them—acts of Parliament. It's what otherwise is called, in parliamentary language, an “omnibus” bill. It amends some elements of what is required, or all the financial elements that are required, in a budget, but many, many additional acts, from the Criminal Code to what the symbol of the King's crown will look like in Canada—a very important element for the budget. One of the reasons we need to get the Minister of Finance here....

A colleague who mentioned earlier that the minister has now been in the House six times since January was feeling optimistic that the minister may have turned a new leaf and would be considering appearing more often in Parliament and being held to account. This is really what this is about. With the minister's appearance in question period yesterday, he held out some optimism for today. Alas, he was mistaken.

The question is that the minister spent time here on the weekend, as we know, meeting with friends like Hillary Clinton, but not having the time to commit...although she is committing, apparently. We're told that perhaps, by some sort of communiqué here, she will commit to coming next week, but will not commit to coming for two hours. When you're spending over \$490 billion in one year in a budget, and you're spending \$3.1 trillion over the five years of the fiscal framework, then we don't think it is a great deal to ask for the minister to spend two hours with a very congenial group of members of Parliament asking questions. Presumably the Deputy Prime Minister is in very fine form in terms of the knowledge of the details of the 51 acts that the minister is proposing to spend.

Just in case the folks who are watching this aren't fully up to speed, let me summarize a few of the financial elements of this piece of legislation.

An hon. member: Go for it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: As I said, the budget, over the next five years, has set cumulative spending of \$3.1 trillion. By the way, that's a record in a five-year fiscal framework plan. These numbers, to be believed, require a few other things to happen. Remember, only six months ago the same minister who predicted that we would have a balanced budget at the end of the fiscal framework is now projecting no balanced budget in sight and is adding \$130 billion of debt to the national debt of the country. That's if you assume that in future budgets—in the next year, for example—they don't decide to spend a single dollar more than they pledged to spend in this one.

I think there's very little expectation that this government will not use the opportunity of perhaps a Speech from the Throne or an economic statement in the fall, followed by another budget, to have more spending added to this. But right now what that means is at the end of this fiscal framework we'll have a record national debt of an astounding almost \$1.4 trillion. We're hearing in the news today about President Biden holding emergency meetings about the fact the United States is now at their debt ceiling. Many don't think perhaps that we have one, but we do have a debt ceiling. With our debt ceiling the maximum amount we're allowed to have right now is \$1.8 trillion. At the spending rate of this government, I expect within this mandate we're going to be facing the same problem of reaching a debt ceiling issue for Canada.

Those are big numbers, but what affects Canadians every day is what's going on in the daily budget. The interest on the debt—like your credit card you have to pay interest on anything you borrow—this government has managed to build up will rise from \$44 billion today to \$50 billion in five years. That's if you're to believe their interest rate calculations.

The budget document outlines interest rate calculations, and, for example, it suggests that next year interest rates will be 6.2%. The first quarter projection from the Bank of Canada is that by that period of time, in the first quarter of next year, interest rates will actually be 6.6%. We're only a month past the budget and the minister's financial projections on what the interest rate will be are already incorrect according to the Bank of Canada. That will drive up the costs of borrowing and the costs of that debt.

That debt is more than we spend on health care from the federal government. Think about that. All of that money could be going to improve our health care. We know in the province where I live, a province of a million people, we have a waiting list of 142,000 people waiting for a doctor. They can't get a primary doctor to get access. If you don't have a general practitioner doctor, you don't have access to the health care system. Imagine what \$44 billion to \$50 billion could do, instead of paying interest on debt, to improve that. It might actually help us meet our 2% target for NATO, which we are declining on.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: We're not hitting that?

Mr. Rick Perkins: We're not hitting the 2% target on NATO. We're not even close. We're about 1% of the target. We're dropping.

So the issue going forward is, in a more unstable world, with not only what Russia is doing but potential aggression from China, we have to be investing more and more in our defence spending if we're going to be a defender of democracy around the world.

Now \$50 billion in interest, in that context, is actually \$10 billion more than we spend on our entire defence policy, it's \$10 billion more than we spend on national defence. There are a lot of better things we could be doing with that interest rate than giving it to bankers in Canada, taxpayer money, rather than doing this.

This is the legacy of the Trudeau family. Pierre Trudeau, when he was Prime Minister—and left office in 1984—had accumulated \$468 billion of national debt. It seems small, but that's on a budget of about \$95 billion a year. The deficit that he left was 8.9% of GDP; in other words, that would be like \$157 billion today.

Liberals are projecting inflation to be at 3.5% this year. Right now it's at a little over 5%. The Bank of Canada is saying interest rates are likely to be 6.2% by next year. So the Liberal projections on interest rates, obviously, are way off in this budget. In order for the government to meet this 3.5% target by July, which is only a few weeks away, interest rates...or inflation is going to have drop. Sorry, I shouldn't say "interest rates", inflation will drop to 3.5%. In order for that to happen, inflation has to drop to 2% by July in order to get 3.5% for the year. That's not likely to happen. We're tracking at a little over 5%.

The \$3.1 trillion in spending adds gasoline to the fire of inflation that we have. It's likely to be inflationary, as is Joe Biden's oxymoronically named Inflation Reduction Act, where actually the U.S. government is spending a trillion dollars. That's actually inflationary and not inflation reduction, but apparently Democrats need a lesson in basic economics and math as well.

Guess how much federal spending was in the last year of the Harper government?

An hon. member: How much?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It was \$280 billion.

An hon. member: That sounds like a lot.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It is. It's a lot by any measure, but it had a surplus at one point of \$9 billion. That's responsible fiscal management. This year ending, the budget is \$156 billion in spending. That's up \$176 billion or 63% since the last Conservative government. In only eight years, the government is spending 63% more.

In this fiscal framework, which means spending for the next five years, the government budget will rise again, if there is no further new spending added, to \$543 billion in year five. That's if these economic projections on interest rates, inflation and unemployment are to be believed. That's \$263 billion more than the last budget of the Harper government. Imagine that. That's a 94% increase in spending by this government since being elected.

Now, lest you think that the deficits are a result of a lack of revenue and necessary spending, that would in fact be incorrect. Government revenue is taxes from you, me and all Canadians. Revenue will have risen by \$282 billion at the end of this budget cycle. That's \$282 billion in more tax revenue from taxpayers at the end of this five-year fiscal framework. In other words, government tax revenue has gone up \$261 billion, or 92%. That's a 92% increase in tax revenue from Canadians, yet they still can't see their way to balancing a budget.

That's why having the minister appear is essential in terms of accountability for this kind of spending. The impact of this kind of spending is huge. As we know, and as many people on social media know, this Prime Minister has added more debt to Canada than all other prime ministers combined.

Interest rates are at the highest in decades. A family who bought a typical home five years ago, with a typical mortgage that's now up for renewal in these high interest rate times, will actually pay \$7,000 more a year for a mortgage on the same house they bought five years ago. No wonder Canadians are feeling the pinch and squeeze.

It's not just mortgage rates that are driving up the problem of paycheques that don't go as far as they used to and of Canadians having to cut their diets. Mothers are putting water in their children's milk because they cannot afford the 10% food inflation that we are seeing now, on top of increased costs just to stay in their own house. The 10% more food inflation has been going on now for more than a year.

These are the reasons why people are writing to us all the time saying, "Please help. What can we do? My paycheque is not going up the way food costs or my housing costs are going up." I've had people, particularly those on fixed incomes, phoning me and writing to me in my constituency office, telling me that they've had to sell their family home. They're on a fixed income. They can't afford to heat, eat, pay their mortgage and pay all the expenses associated with a house anymore. They're having to sell their family home as a result.

They're distraught over having to do that because these are homes. They're not just houses; they're where people conduct their lives. It's where their children grew up. It's where their great-grandchildren come. It's where the family celebrations happen.

You know, according to Bloomberg, we have the second-highest housing bubble in the world. It's not as if we're short on land here.

We live in the second-largest land mass in the world. Only Russia has more land than we do. How is it that we have such a huge land, with a population that's modest compared to that of a lot of other countries...? It's approaching maybe 40 million people in the next little while, but it's very modest compared to those. We have the second-most available land in the world, yet Vancouver and Toronto have the third- and tenth-most overpriced housing markets in the world.

We have a lot of municipal councils and we know lots of them are not dominated by conservative-minded folks, unfortunately. They're not, and the result of that is we have a lot of policies the left-wing councils believe are well intended but that actually end up putting gatekeepers in place who block the construction of new housing.

As an example, in my riding... The Lebanese community is very important in Halifax. They've built an enormous amount of housing in the peninsula. They have lots of history going back to the seventies and escaping the wars in Lebanon.

One housing developer told me he has a piece of property in downtown Halifax. He's been trying for five years to get approval to build that housing. It's a 21-storey building. Now, in the big cities of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, that may not seem like a lot, but 21 storeys is a substantial building in Halifax. It's not unusual, however, because the two properties beside it have 21-storey housing buildings. After five years of him fighting city hall and left-wing housing development policies, the city came back and said, "Oh no, you can only build a five-storey building there". He said, "Wait a minute. There's a 21-storey building on either side. That's all I'm asking for. I'm not asking to build a building much taller than 21 storeys. I'm asking to build one the same." They said, "No, it's five storeys."

Of course, we have a housing shortage, too. We don't have enough space in downtown Halifax for housing. At the end of the day, we still have to find a place for people to go. Apparently, Halifax city council and the development gatekeepers there think it's asking too much to build more housing in Halifax. They have said no.

Do you know what's going to happen on that piece of property? That piece of property is going to sit idle, because he's not going to build a five-storey building there. What's going to happen is that much-needed housing is going to go on and he'll let his descendants—his son and daughter—inherit the land and it will sit vacant for decades, until somebody fixes the problem.

Luckily, after the next election... He doesn't have to wait decades. He only has to wait until after the next election when we have a prime minister who will get rid of these municipal gatekeepers.

Mr. Chair, I know everyone is enthralled by my presentation. Just as a check on everyone's focus and time—because I know we have some more votes going up—I'd like to get a sense of the room. It's hard to get a sense of the room, given where everybody is right now. I'm going to get a sense as to whether or not all the members here would like me to continue my dissertation on ministerial accountability.

I'd like to move to adjourn.

The Chair: Can I see the members come up?

Okay, we're going to the clerk.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We'll continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Like all of my colleagues around the table who hold elected office, I'm an optimist by nature—or we wouldn't put our name on the ballot—so optimistically, I will take that as a vote of confidence by the government and their coalition partner, the NDP, for me to keep going. I'm a little disappointed that my colleagues want me to stop, but nonetheless, I'll keep going.

An hon. member: They know you better than we do.

Mr. Rick Perkins: As I was saying, before I so rudely interrupted myself, the cost of this budget and why we need the minister here to discuss it and be held accountable for two hours—not one, but two hours, and we haven't been able to get a commitment for two hours—is because food bank usage is at an all-time high.

I'm sure that the government likes to talk about its input costs and how much it spends. It doesn't seem to like to talk too much about its output achievements. I'm sure that one of its proudest achievements is how food banks usage is at an all-time high. Food Banks Canada recorded one and a half million visits to food banks in just one month, which is a 35% increase compared to last year.

I'm sure that's a question we'd like to put to the Minister of Finance in our “finding Freeland” exercise, but we understand. We thought it would be a “freeing” Freeland exercise, because we thought the PMO may have been preventing her from coming, but apparently we're back to “finding Freeland”, because we're not getting any response from her either in the House—because it was another minister answering today—or through the committee that she's willing to be here for two hours.

If she could spare us two hours—

The Chair: Members and MP Perkins, the bells are ringing, so we will suspend.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Chair, if I could ask, maybe there's unanimous consent around the table to go for another 15 minutes.

The Chair: Members, do we have UC? Yes, okay.

Continue, MP Perkins, for another 15 minutes or so.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm overwhelmed by two votes of confidence in my presentation in the space of a few minutes. Thank you, colleagues. It's overwhelming and I'm almost brought to tears by it, as the Minister of Finance was almost brought to tears by the presen-

tation by former senator Hillary Clinton on the weekend. It doesn't quite bring me to tears, but the budget brings me to tears when I think of what it's going to cause the generations to come to have to pay.

As I went over before a couple of these respites here, my view is that the Liberal government's inflation tax—which I outlined all the reasons for—is eating into the paycheques of the middle class at an alarming, alarming rate that is causing people severe problems. There are real-world consequences of the reckless decisions, including personal ones. I would like to understand whether the Minister of Finance in her budget allocations for the Privy Council Office did budget \$6,000 a night for hotel rooms in London. We don't know about the latest one. That was for the Queen's funeral. I'm sure the Prime Minister, while he was there for King Charles' coronation, stayed in the Holiday Inn, and Katy Perry may have been there. The \$9,000 a night for a holiday in Jamaica wouldn't have been in the budget because it was a free gift to the Prime Minister.

I'm sorry. That would probably be an inappropriate question for the Minister of Finance. She would not have budgeted for that because that would mean that the Prime Minister either had taxpayers pay for it or perhaps he paid for it himself, neither of which happened. Instead, the Prime Minister chose a family friend to room with at \$9,000 a night.

Instead of creating more cash, the cash that people need, and more of what cash buys, we have the situation in which paycheques are stretched and have less buying power. When we are empowered, however, that of course will change and we'll remove government gatekeepers and we'll get more homes built and we'll cut the carbon tax and reduce the cost of living.

You'd think those were just buzzwords. As I said, let me just take a moment, if I may, to quote from the report, for the first quarter of 2023, called “Canadian Survey of Consumer Expectations”, from the Bank of Canada—the independent monetary adviser and manager for our country, which has no oar in the water and no stick in the game of this decision on public policy, on fiscal policy in a political, partisan way.

Let me just read some of this to you. These are the results of the first-quarter survey, volume 4.1, April 3, 2023. This survey on consumer confidence took place between January 27 and February 16, 2023, and there were some follow-up interviews to round this report out, which were done in March, so not that long ago.

These are quotes from this report, from the overview, first of all: “Most consumers think the Bank’s ability to get inflation back to target is hampered by high government spending.” The public is smart. They see what’s going on. The Bank of Canada’s report goes on to say, “High inflation and rising interest rates are putting pressures on consumers—and particularly on mortgage holders.” This is not me. This is not our leader. This is the Bank of Canada, and this budget is key to this in terms of pouring \$3.1 trillion on the gasoline fire of the Liberal Party inflation.

The report goes on to say, “Most Canadians see a recession as the most likely scenario for the economy.” So the record increases, the 35% increase in food bank usage, is not a record they aspire to. They have generated such confidence in Canadian consumers that Canadian consumers actually think that in the next 12 months we’re going to be in a recession, and who am I to disagree with that? I think they’re absolutely right. The people are always right and they have a sense of what’s going on first, even if the government does not.

Moreover, “Respondents expect inflation to slow for goods, such as gasoline and vehicles.” We haven’t seen that yet.

It continues:

But while their inflation expectations for goods have fallen, consumers continue to be frustrated by high food prices at grocery stores. One respondent said, “Food prices create a lot of stress” and “this bothers me the most.” Another said, “Even the prices for specials are too high.”

And isn’t that right?

It goes on to say:

Many also think that high government spending, including spending following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic

—following the outbreak of COVID, not during COVID—
may affect the Bank’s ability to get inflation to target for three years or more.

That’s a pretty pessimistic view that people have, that the government spending...and remember, at the time that this survey of consumers was done by the Bank of Canada, they hadn’t seen this budget. They’re still thinking that they should believe what the Minister of Finance said in the economic statement, that within five years we would have a balanced budget, and they were still feeling pessimistic about what would happen on government spending.

But let me repeat that again. Imagine, though, what that would be if they had done the survey now and found out that not only does the Minister of Finance not ever project a balanced budget, but the Liberal Party passed a policy ordering them to never have a balanced budget. It blows my mind. So that’s why, as this says,

Many also think that high government spending, including spending following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, may affect the Bank’s ability to get inflation to target for three years or more.

That’s a pretty sorry state of things. The report then goes on, and I am sparing you a lot of other things that are very good reading in this and I would encourage everyone, especially the government members of Parliament, to read it. It goes on to say, under the title “The impact of monetary policy on spending is broadening to services”, the following:

High inflation is negatively impacting household finances, and rising interest rates are adding pressure. Compared with how consumers viewed their financial

positions during the 2017–18 cycle of policy rate tightening, more than twice as many now say they are financially worse off. Consumers also feel that they are less able to access credit and that the chance they will default on their borrowing has increased. Some Canadians—particularly Indigenous people and holders of variable-rate mortgages—are more likely than others to say they are negatively affected.

So this is the Bank of Canada’s survey of consumers who are saying they are worse off today than they were in 2017 or 2018. Now I know members of Parliament always care about re-election. That’s something that should stick in the craw of Liberal MPs. If they want to get re-elected, they’re going to have to face an electorate that actually thinks they’re worse off than they were before the 2019 election, let alone the balanced budget halcyon days of 2015 with the Harper government.

The Bank of Canada goes on to say this in their consumer report that just came out in April:

Consumers are noticing the impacts of high inflation and rising interest rates on their spending plans. And these impacts are broadening to include spending on services. About one-third of consumers expect to travel less often, eat out less often and enjoy fewer paid entertainment or social activities in the next 12 months than they did in the previous 12 months.

And we know from other reports that on the lower end of the income scale people are actually putting water in milk for their children and they’re choosing which bill to pay each period because they can’t pay all their bills every month like they used to only a few years ago. The report goes on to say:

This is largely because of the high prices of these services and other essential purchases. “Due to higher interest rates and higher inflation, we are not eating out as much,” one consumer said. Another reported, “I am now more willing to say yes to travelling, but I have less opportunities due to higher interest rates.”

Some people in my riding report to me that they can’t afford the gas to travel 20 kilometres to visit their parents anymore. They report that they’re on a fixed income, they’re on Canada disability, and they can’t even see their own parents or that the parents can’t even go see their children and grandchildren because it’s been too expensive to drive the few kilometres to their children’s house.

The Bank of Canada report on the state of consumer confidence in Canada, which was released in April, talks about, on page 11 of 19, high interest rates and high inflation. There we go again with the magic combo. It’s more than just inflation. It’s also just higher interest rates. The report says that high interest rates and high inflation “are not impacting households evenly”. This is critical.

The report states:

Consumers with variable-rate mortgages and those in equity-deserving groups (such as Indigenous people, people with disabilities and racialized people) are more likely to cite being negatively affected than other consumers, including renters and homeowners without mortgages.

So here you go—the Liberal government policies. They stand up and claim that they've helped people out of poverty. This survey says that people on the lower-income side and the middle class and those who aspire to get into the middle class, as the Prime Minister says, are no longer aspiring to get into the middle class. They're aspiring just to pay their bills on the lower-income side. This government's policies are impacting lower-income people more dramatically.

The report goes on to say the following:

Respondents who have become worse off are showing more distress than other Canadians across several dimensions. These consumers are more likely to report:

spending and saving less in response to interest rate increases and higher inflation;

facing a financial position that is worse than 12 months ago and that will be even worse 12 months from now;

finding that credit is harder to access now than it was 12 months ago and that it will be even harder 12 months from now.

Compared with other individuals, respondents who have been negatively affected also expect:

a greater chance of defaulting on their debt payments in the next three months;

a greater chance of losing their job in the next three months;

more of a decline in what they earn when compared with inflation;

more of a decline in their real spending.

These are real problems that real people face who haven't lived on a trust fund all their lives and who have to worry about paying their mortgages every day. It's why we need to be able to question the minister for two hours. Personally, I think we should spend a day questioning her in this committee. I think the opposition is being generous in limiting it to two hours for this minister, given all that she has to account for.

This is probably the end of the quotes I'll use from the report for this part of my presentation:

Most respondents expect a recession in the next 12 months.

The next part is in quotes:

"We are feeling more stress with the interest rates perhaps still going up. It's hard to see where things are going, so we are [trying to save] more because we don't know if we are going to be able to afford things. [It's in] our minds [a lot]."

If you've ever had to worry and had sleepless nights about paying your mortgage and how you're going to put food on the table for your kids, these are very, very difficult times. The proof is in the pudding. Canada's largest financial institution is the Royal Bank of Canada, as we all know. They're in almost every community across Canada. The Royal Bank on May 3—this is hot off the press—issued a document they call Proof Point. It's probably a pretty good title. This one is called "Proof Point: More Canadians to fall behind on debt payments—but [some] will manage".

The first bullet point talks about "a looming recession". So here you have the confidence index from the Bank of Canada saying there's a looming recession in the minds of Canadians and here you have the Royal Bank of Canada saying, "A looming recession and an unemployment rate projected to climb to 6.6% by early 2024"—I'll remind you that the budget says 6.2%, so it only took the government a month to be wrong—"are set to tip more Canadians into loan delinquencies and insolvencies."

The bank goes on to say, "With massive pandemic-related support measures largely over and living costs now soaring, mortgage delinquencies could rise by more than a third of current levels over the coming year." Imagine that—it's more than a third of the current levels. Delinquency rates are people falling behind, on the verge of losing their house, because of this budget. The minister needs to answer for that in committee.

The Royal Bank goes on to say on May 3, hot off the press, that, "Consumer insolvencies could increase almost 30% over the next three years"—that's 30%—"returning to pre-pandemic levels and likely remaining on an upward trajectory after that."

Moreover, consumer insolvencies are going to increase 30% and go on an upward trajectory. That's not a statistic any government should be proud of.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I wanted to let you know I don't believe we have UC to continue at this point, because we said only 15 minutes.

Is that correct? Is that right?

The Chair: Yes, we said approximately 15 minutes.

Members, we'll be back right after the vote.

We're suspended.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We are back, members.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a point of order, Chair.

I would like to note, since you're not in the room, that I would like to be added to the speaking list.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Kurek. I've added you to the speaking list.

On the speaking list, as a refresher, I have MP Perkins, MP Morantz, MP Lawrence, MP Morantz again and then MP Kurek.

To refocus everybody on what we're doing right now, we are discussing a subamendment to MP Blaikie's amendment to the main motion, which reads:

That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023.

Go ahead, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your summarizing where we are in terms of what the ask is. We're trying, as we put it, to find Freeland and have the Minister of Finance appear for two hours on her budget implementation bill, which amends 51 acts of the Government of Canada. A number of these are not related to the actual revenue or expenses of the government.

Where I left off before the vote, Mr. Chair, was discussing the issue of how the budgetary spending in this bill is impacting not only the confidence of Canadians going forward and their feeling that we will be in a recession within 12 months, according to the Bank of Canada, but how it is impacting those on the lower income side in Canada, particularly. They are being disproportionately hurt by the high-inflation, high-interest rate environment that this spending has been a major contributor to.

I was citing some of the economic statistics on this, having gone through a few of the highlights from the Bank of Canada's most recent report. It's the hot-off-the-press report from the Royal Bank of Canada called "Proof Point: More Canadians to fall behind on debt payments" It was written by two of the Royal Bank's economists, Robert Hogue and Mishael Liu, and published on May 3, 2023.

I was summarizing the first point, which is that a looming recession, according to them, is projected as unemployment is projected to rise from its current rate of 5% to 6.6% by early 2024. That is according to the Royal Bank of Canada. Most disturbingly, as a result of the financial plan of this Liberal government and our search to find Freeland to get answers to why this is a good approach, the Royal Bank projects that consumers are going to have an increase in insolvency of "almost 30% over the next three years". That's people defaulting on credit cards, mortgage rates, bank loans and that kind of thing.

They put in this that there were some gains. They call this the "bottom line". It's on the front side:

The noticeable improvement in Canadians' finances (in the aggregate) early in pandemic wasn't sustainable.

Most of that was caused by cash payments being given to people who needed it—and, in a lot of cases, people who didn't need it and businesses that didn't need it—and the government spending about half, or \$200 million, during the pandemic on things that were not pandemic-related.

The report goes on to say the following:

Those gains are now reversing and will likely erode further amid a softening economy and higher interest rates.

The Royal Bank, on May 3, went on to say:

...a booming housing market put mortgage debt on a fast track. By late-2021, Canada's household debt-to-income ratio had exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

The next section is called "Cracks are beginning to form". That's a typical banker understatement. They're "beginning to form". The bank went on to say:

Over the last year, the burden of that debt has grown even heavier for Canadian households...These developments have caused an increasing number of Canadians to fall behind in on debt service payments that have suddenly swelled.

They've swelled, of course, because of interest rates. The report went on to say:

...the rate of consumers 90+ days late on their debt service payments has nevertheless risen for installment loans—

Installment loans are things, according to this report, that are typically used for one-off purposes like home renovations, unexpected emergencies and debt consolidation. The rate of consumer loans that are 90%-plus in arrears have risen in this area. These are things like credit cards and auto loans. More recently, they're seeing lines of credit. Lines of credit are based on your house.

When people are starting to dip into their lines of credit to pay for groceries, to pay heating costs and to pay increased mortgage costs, it's like using a credit card to pay for the other credit card bills. That is an inevitable economic spiral downhill, particularly with these higher interest rates caused by the \$3.1 trillion of spending that this budget implementation bill sets out.

The report says:

A looming recession and the ongoing effect of higher interest rates will only add stress in the period ahead...

the modest contraction we expect for Canada's economy will likely trigger job losses.

That is according to the Royal Bank. It goes on to say:

We project our national unemployment rate will rise from the current 5% to 6.6% by 2024Q1. Historically, the loss of a job has been one of the principal factors contributing to loan delinquencies and consumer insolvencies in Canada.

That's understandable.

The next section goes on to pose a legitimate question that I think all Canadians are asking, which is: "How much more challenging will it get?" for me?

The report says that "rising unemployment could push a growing number of Canadians into insolvency over the coming year—though higher interest rates and heavier debt service loads would likely contribute too."

Remember, we've seen other reports from other companies stating that more than half of Canadians are only \$200 away every month from not being able to pay their bills. When you get a spike in interest rates—whether it's your mortgage, increased costs in housing, or the annual 10% increase in food inflation that seems regularized under this government—something has to give for people. We start to see insolvency.

Now, if you pile on top of that a forecasted rise in unemployment from 5% to 6.5%, that's a lot of Canadians losing their jobs and unable to pay their bills.

The bank goes on to say in this report, "We expect the household debt-to-service ratio to rise more than 1 percentage point over the next year, to a historical high of 15.5% by 2024Q4. Consumer insolvencies could rise almost 30% over the next three years, according to our analysis."

This is obviously a massive concern for those who are in public office who actually will see more traffic. We will see people coming into our offices looking to their members of Parliament for help as they have to sell their house or no longer have a house and can't even afford to live where they are. That's why ministerial accountability is so critical in this discussion of the amendment.

Earlier today I was giving those watching a little bit of guidance about what the Treasury Board of Canada—the spending arm of Canada—says are the responsibilities and accountabilities of ministers. Ministers obviously have to be held to account by Parliament. It's a fundamental tenet of our Westminster system.

For the interpreters, just so they know what page of this document I'm starting on, it is page 9 in English. At the top, the title is: "The Role of Parliament in the Accountability Regime". It starts off by saying:

This section provides an overview of the role that Parliament plays in the accountability regime, specifically in relation to financial management. It highlights Parliament's involvement in the assignment of responsibility through its legislative role, explains the key mechanisms that Parliament uses to hold the government to account, and sets out the limits of Parliament's role in sanctioning ministers. In the course of explaining the practices of parliamentary scrutiny

—something we're trying to get to here is parliamentary scrutiny of this spending plan—

the key principles of collective and individual responsibility and the anonymity of public servants are spelled out and certain misconceptions are addressed. The section makes it clear that accountability:

is a shared relationship between Parliament and ministers;

That's an important point. It's shared between Parliament and ministers.

Moreover it "is fundamentally political", meaning that the elected officers, in this context, are fundamentally responsible. And it "depends on the neutrality of the Public Service for its efficacy."

Next is section 2.1, "Parliament and the assignment of responsibility". This is a Treasury Board guideline to ministers:

Parliament is the primary guarantor of the government's political accountability in responsible government.

It has a footnote here—five. If you read the footnote, it says, "The primary guarantor of legal accountability is the judiciary", as we know, which this government has tried to interfere with a few times.

The report from Treasury Board goes on to say:

The direct accountability of ministers to the House of Commons is a central feature of this system, and its efficacy depends heavily on the will and capacity of the House to hold ministers accountable.

Let me read that one again: "its efficacy depends heavily on the will and capacity of the House to hold ministers accountable."

We know this committee, as an instrument of the House of Commons, has the will—at least on the opposition side—to hold the minister to account. We know the House, in session and with our tools on the opposition side—like question period—has the will to hold the minister to account. However, six days of work in the House by the Minister of Finance since January.... It makes it difficult for parliamentarians to do the work that people sent us here to

do, which is to hold the minister to account for the most fundamental thing.

I'm going to digress here a little—that's for the translators. On our side, and I'm sure on the government's side, too—they are, I can see, listening intently—we often get emails asking us to make sure there's a vote of confidence in the government. Just so the people watching know, every money bill of Parliament is automatically a vote of confidence in the government. It's important because, if the government doesn't have the confidence of the House to spend the people's money, it has to go to an election to seek a new mandate.

The budget we're dealing with here, Bill C-47, is a confidence vote. In determining whether or not and how we should vote in this budget in the next stages—once it comes out of committee—we need to hold the minister accountable, get answers and make a determination, as parliamentarians, about whether the government still has the confidence of the House...in our decision on how to vote on that.

I know, for example, the "supply agreement", as it's called, between the NDP and Liberals requires the NDP to vote with the government on this, even if the NDP... I'm sure some of the NDP members are not happy with this budget. I'm sure some of them are not happy with the fact that their supply agreement says there should be a pharmacare program, but there isn't one in this budget. I'm sure some of them are not happy with the fact that, truly, this is not a dental care program. It's just a cheque that goes out, not a true dental care program covering the large costs people have.

I'm sure that, if they were not bound by this supply arrangement, some of the members, in hearing the minister's answers—if the minister comes to this committee for two hours, at least, to deal with this half a trillion-dollar spending plan that budgets for this annually—would ask some of these questions and hold the minister to account. Perhaps, if they were truly free members of Parliament, they would be willing to look objectively at this budget and not be bound by what their whip tells them they have to do because of the supply agreement with the Liberals. They would actually vote against this budget. Alas, I fear that's probably not going to be the case. The independence of the NDP disappeared in the supply agreement.

The assignment of responsibility of Parliament is key.

It goes on to say in this report, "However, although Parliament is sovereign, it does not exercise executive authority." Of course, executive authority rests with cabinet, not with Parliament.

Let me read that again. It's "the responsibility"—of course, we said earlier—"of ministers, individually and collectively" to look after the executive branch of the government. It goes on to say:

As Chair of the Public Accounts Committee recently put it, "Parliament is not an institution of management; Parliament is an institution of accountability. We're not here to run the government; we're here to hold the government accountable for the way they run themselves."

There's a footnote here on that. It's number 6. Wow, look at that. It says, "John Williams, M.P., Public Accounts testimony, May 6, 2004."

I believe that he was a Liberal member of Parliament, was he not, John Williams? It's before my time in the House. We'll check that one. It's not John Williamson.

It's John Williams, M.P., public accounts committee testimony, 2004. The footnote continues: "That said, parliamentary committees can obviously contribute significantly to policy development through debate and discussion."

Mr. Damien Kurek: He was a Conservative.

Mr. Rick Perkins: There you have it. A Conservative actually said:

Parliament is not an institution of management; Parliament is an institution of accountability. We're not here to run the government;

—as Opposition—

we're here to hold the government accountable for the way they run themselves.

That's a key principle. John Williams was a fine Edmontonian and a fine representative of his community and obviously very respectful of the role of accountability in Parliament, the role that members of Parliament play and the role of ministers being accountable.

The report goes on to say, on page 10 at the top:

While the organization of the ministry and the corresponding organization of portfolios is one of the defining responsibilities of the prime minister, Parliament plays a key role in the assignment of ministerial responsibility. In Canadian practice, departmental acts, which are passed by Parliament, characteristically set out a number of important provisions that help define ministerial responsibilities.

As we know, Bill C-47 here, which we want the minister to answer on, amends 51 acts of Parliament. Perhaps we should have the whole cabinet here through a series of meetings to hold themselves accountable for the parts of the acts they are responsible for in this bill.

Well, there was a promise, I am told. I was in private life back then, busy running a retail chain. I was in private life then, but in 2015 I understand that the now Prime Minister and then leader of the Liberal Party promised not to do these kinds of bills that take a budget bill and add in amendments to the Criminal Code, amendments to the oceans protection plan, and things that have nothing to do with the budget. He would never do that. Promise made, promise broken: That's what we've come to expect from this government.

This report from Treasury Board goes on to say on page 10 that "They"—they being the department, Parliament and ministry—"provide for the appointment of a minister; set out the powers, duties, and functions for which the minister is responsible; and give the minister responsibility for the overall direction and management of the department's financial and public service resources."

As we know from the Minister of Finance's mandate letter—and we know this only from the letter, because in the last six months we've been unable to get the minister to accept the invitation from the finance committee. Theoretically the minister's letter says, at

least in print, that the minister is to be "accountable to Parliament both individually, for your style of leadership and the performance of your responsibilities, and collectively, in support of [the ministers]". The minister is to be available to Parliament to answer questions. What a concept.

The Treasury Board report on ministerial responsibility goes on to say that, "Parliament has also approved the Financial Administration Act". For those of you who don't know, that's the act that allows and sets out the parameters of how the government collects and spends money—how it collects and spends your money and, when they spend more than they collect from you, how they borrow money. It provides them with their credit card authority. That obviously is the responsibility of the Minister of Finance, the very heart of our issue here today. The report continues:

This Act is the cornerstone of the legal framework for general financial management and accountability of public service organizations. It describes the manner in which government spending may be approved, expenditures made, revenues obtained, and funds borrowed.

As I've said, it's almost as though I had read this before. Perhaps some of the ministers should have read it. The report continues:

It provides a procedure for the internal control of funds allocated to departments and agencies by Parliament and for the preparation of the Public Accounts of Canada, which contain the government's annual statement of revenues and expenditures.

The report goes on to say:

The Financial Administration Act assigns rights and duties to ministers and directly to deputy heads in relation to the organizations they manage. These rights and duties include the obligation for a deputy head to establish procedures and maintain records respecting the control of financial commitments chargeable to public funds;

Furthermore it states:

...the fact that only a minister or his or her delegate can request the issuance of a payment; and that before a payment is issued in return for work, goods, or services, the deputy of a minister (or another delegate) must certify that the work has been performed, the goods received, or the services rendered.

Ministers remain individually and collectively responsible for their statutory duties and accountable to Parliament...

A C C O U N T A B L E—that's how you spell the word "accountable".

The Chair: MP Perkins, we just need to suspend here for a couple of minutes. We'll be back.

● (1750) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1755)

The Chair: MP Perkins, you may continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Did I hear the chair? There's a lot of conversation in the room. Are we back?

The Chair: We are back.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Oh, good. I'm happy that the word search on "accountability" on the break was successful, so I'll continue where I said:

Ministers remain individually and collectively responsible for their statutory duties and accountable to Parliament and the prime minister for the stewardship of the resources and exercise of powers assigned to them.

It goes on to say at the bottom of page:

Collective ministerial responsibility refers to the convention requiring coherence and discipline of the ministry in deciding policy, managing government operations, and speaking to Parliament with a single voice.

It's a team sport, as we know. I'm sorry; it doesn't say "it's a team sport, as we know", in the Treasury Board guidelines; that was editorializing.

An important manifestation of this principle is the requirement of Cabinet solidarity: while ministers engage in full and frank discussion of proposals in Cabinet, once a decision is taken, all Ministers must be prepared to support it publicly or resign. The decisions of Cabinet...

By that convention, I take it that the entire ministry is supportive of never balancing the budget, that the entire cabinet is supportive of a piece of legislation that is omnibus and amends acts unrelated to the raising or spending of money.

The last sentence on this page says:

The decisions of Cabinet have mostly political and administrative effect, and their implementation is left largely to the minister or ministers directly responsible. Thus, accountability for specific policies...

Accountability for specific policy details of this framework are provided in another section. The measures to be taken that strengthen accountability are included in the report, "Management in the Government of Canada, a Commitment to Continuous Improvement".

There we have that reference again. I haven't read that document, but I am sure it's quite enlightening.

We'll go on to the next section at the bottom of page 11, which again gets to the heart of the matter, which is entitled:

Individual responsibility of ministers

In applying the concepts of responsible government to individual ministers, we see that they have *responsibility* for their portfolios, which can include not only their departments and any arm's-length organizations in those departments, but also non-departmental organizations, such as Crown corporations. The prime minister assigns responsibility for portfolios, for the administration of various statutes, and for particular mandates within portfolio and statutory authorities. In current Canadian practice, a minister's powers, duties, and functions in his or her department are typically set out in a departmental statute. Responsibility thus reflects a sphere of legal authority, both statutory and non-statutory, and carries duties that must be discharged within that sphere. In a parliamentary system, the vast majority of executive actions are taken by or on behalf of an individual minister or ministers.

Now here we get into it:

A minister's accountability to Parliament for his or her department means all actions of the department, whether pertaining to policy—

The Chair: MP Perkins, we're going to suspend at this time. I think it's a good time for a bio break, a stretch break and to give our hard-working resources who have been doing a tremendous job a break, so we're going to do that, and we'll be back by 7:00 p.m.

• (1755)

(Pause)

• (1800)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

It's great to see everybody. We're back. I hope everybody had a good break.

I think we were last with MP Perkins.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Chair, you were muted. I'm not sure what the last words were.

The Chair: Okay. I was just saying we are back.

I hope you can hear me okay.

Interpreters, I hope the sound is coming through all right.

I hope everybody had a good break, with time to stretch and relax a bit.

Now we're back, and MP Perkins is on.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There are two items that I'd like to bring on a point of order.

First, I would appreciate an update from you, possibly with consultations from the clerk, about whether or not the PMO has indicated that the finance minister would, in fact, be available for what I think has been demonstrated very specifically as two hours to come to this committee. Certainly, it would be nice for all to be able to move forward.

However, the very reasonable request of having the finance minister coming for two hours.... My question through this point of order, Mr. Chair.... After, I will have one further comment to make on a further point of order, but I'm wondering if you could—

The Chair: MP Kurek, thank you for that.

Let me update you right now. We are debating the amendment and the subamendment to the amendment to the main motion. That was "That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023."

We received an email from the minister. She has said that she would like to appear here next Tuesday, which is May 16.

That is where we are, MP Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To qualify the response that you received from the minister, is there a commitment to ensure that she will, in fact, appear for two hours, assuming that the motion passes? We're questioning that.

Is there confirmation that she will, in fact, appear for those two hours?

The Chair: MP Kurek, the minister has said that she will appear on May 16.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The lack of certainty in that is certainly troubling. I imagine that Mr. Perkins in his follow-up will expand more fulsomely on that. I have no doubt.

However, further on a point of order, Mr. Chair, there was a recent PROC report that was tabled that made the unanimous recommendation that chairs chair committee proceedings from the room. I want to ask you, Mr. Chair, to make sure that procedurally, we are following the direction of the very capable PROC committee in all of the work it is undertaking—

The Chair: We are.

I'm sorry to interrupt, MP Kurek, but we are, yes. We are.

The MP who has the floor now is MP Perkins.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, committee members, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for summarizing where we are on the subamendment to the amendment for our effort to find Freeland. I hope it's not free Freeland, as we talked about earlier...that the PMO has given her the latitude to appear before us. We would like the free Freeland.

We assume that she can make up her own mind, but we are still curious, as to the finding Freeland effort, about the six appearances in the House since January and her lack of willingness to accept previous very polite and well-worded invitations by this committee to appear in the last six months. It's very curious that the minister has chosen not to.

Before I get back into the ministerial accountability document of Treasury Board, I spoke earlier in terms of accountability and about the spending that this budget Bill C-47, which amends 51 acts of Parliament, imposes on Canadians and their wallets over the next five years. I spoke about the paycheque deterioration that we've seen as a result of the fiscal program of this Minister of Finance. Her willingness, obviously, to be questioned for two hours is very important. We think that is a small amount of time, given that this is a \$490-billion budget and a \$3.1 trillion spending plan over the next five years.

Quite frankly, in two hours, it will be extremely difficult to question her on the 51 acts of the Government of Canada that this bill intends to amend. In fact, without that I'm not sure that we could get to the creation of a new corporation—the CIC—in that time-frame.

I'm not sure that we could get to the creation of yet another global investment fund. It seems like every six years we have a growth fund, a global investment fund or a fund of some sort that gets \$15 billion.

I'm sure we're not going to get to the \$14 billion Volkswagen contract. I think it was mentioned earlier. It seems awfully embarrassing for me and it actually almost brings a tear to my eye that the only thing in this five-year fiscal framework for that \$14-billion dollar VW contract is the mere \$778 million dollars that the federal government is going to subsidize Volkswagen for to build a plant. The \$13 billion that the minister announced so proudly both in Ontario and also in the House.... He is very proud of it and very effervescent when he talks about it. He is very proud of the fact that the \$13 billion is not actually even in the fiscal framework. That spending actually happens further beyond this fiscal framework.

I suspect that the current minister of industry is hoping that, as prime minister, he will be able to cut the ribbon on this plant five years from now and actually be responsible for then providing \$13 billion of subsidy.

Did I mention that Volkswagen last year had the same revenue as the Government of Canada? Volkswagen's revenue last year was \$413 billion. Guess what. The federal government's revenue was, I believe, \$412 billion or \$413 billion. The difference is that Volkswagen actually made a \$200-billion profit last year, I believe it was. The federal government, having the same revenue, actually made a \$40-billion deficit. They lost \$40 billion.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Why are we subsidizing?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Apparently the company with the same amount of revenue as the Government of Canada needs taxpayers to help them out. They need them to help them out in order to build a battery factory.

The minister has not been forthcoming on the jobs and we will actually get access this week to the contract to be able to know.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Will he actually come to speak?

Mr. Rick Perkins: He has agreed to speak in camera for two hours.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Why in camera?

Mr. Rick Perkins: He says it's commercial confidentiality, but I think the reason the minister wants to be in camera is that he's actually going to be embarrassed by the fact that he claimed in the House.... This goes to the issue of ministerial accountability, which is what this subamendment is about. It's about ministerial accountability. Even the minister of industry has said in the House that this enormous, unprecedented Volkswagen taxpayer subsidy by the Government of Canada has an ROI—a return on investment, as it's known—of five years.

I'm curious about that. I did spend 20 some years in the private sector and I know that a return on investment is when you make the investment and then you actually make a profit on that investment.

Now, in order for the government to even get that basic return of that money in five years, the plant would actually have to be open. Until the plant is open, the plant is not producing revenue. I don't see how, on a plant that the minister by his own words said will take five years to build, it can have a five-year return on investment.

This is the kind of question we need to ask the Minister of Finance—whether she agrees with the Minister of Industry that there is a five-year return on investment on a \$14-billion contract subsidizing a company that has the same revenue as the Government of Canada while at the same time producing no revenue and no batteries for the next five years; that somehow it magically produces it. Maybe that's why we know that the Minister of Industry was actually a corporate lawyer and not a person delivering a P and L statement, or profit and loss, for companies. I think he missed his math there.

At the industry committee last week, we asked the minister for a copy of that ROI report that he so proudly claimed in the House of Commons existed—that there was an ROI report and that the bureaucrats and department had done this amazing work to say that we will get this money paid back within five years. Do you know what the minister's answer was there? He actually came to committee. We invited the minister to come to committee, and he came to committee. When we posed that question to him of whether or not there was an actual report, as he claimed, he said, well, it's the Trillium report.

Now, if you had a computer in front of you, I could give you the URL for the Trillium report. It's a report by a think tank in Ontario, as they're called, to the Ontario government about what the electric vehicle manufacturing industry could be worth in Ontario on theoretical grounds. If the fairy dust got spread here, and the fairy dust got spread there, and we had this part of the manufacturing process here, and we had this assembly of the process there, and if the stars lined up, and if all things worked out, somehow there would be this massive job creation between now and 2050 in Ontario.

Do you know what? I read that report again last night in preparing for this committee, and do you know what I found in that report? The report is called, "Electric Vehicles: a \$48 billion opportunity for Canada". It sounds like something this government would write, because the bigger the number, the more impressive the announcement is. I read through this report twice. I did a word search, which you can do on a PDF, and I didn't find the word "Volkswagen" once in that report. I don't understand how the minister says this is the report that is publicly available that supports his contention that there is a five-year return on investment on this \$14-billion investment in Volkswagen for a plant that won't even open for five years. He says it's right there in that report. I searched it. I guess that's why we're going to have the minister back. We will have the minister back for two hours to talk about this contract.

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance if she knows of a different way to calculate a return on investment. Perhaps it's not the one they teach in business school. Perhaps it's not the one that every company uses in trying to figure out whether they should make a capital investment. Perhaps this Minister of Finance from her journalistic career—not business career, because she didn't have one—has a different definition of what a return on investment is. Perhaps she learned it from the Prime Minister, who said that budgets balance themselves. As we know, apparently they don't.

When you look at this very large Bill C-47—I'll hold it up for people to see—this budget implementation bill that implements 51 act changes, including the symbol of the crown for the King—

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, could we just have a quorum call?

The Chair: Clerk, do we have quorum?

The Clerk: Yes, there's quorum at the moment.

The Chair: There's quorum.

Continue please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm happy there's quorum because I know that when I've moved motions to adjourn and my colleagues on the Conservative side have agreed to adjourn, I've been really quite entertained by the fact that the government continues to vote against adjourning so that I can continue explaining to them all the intricacies of ministerial accountability, and so that I can explain to them why we need to have the minister here, like her colleague the Minister of Industry has done in trying to be held accountable for a \$14 billion unbooked expenditure. I certainly would like to ask the Minister of Finance.... Besides the fact that she clearly has a different definition of return on investment—and if she doesn't, maybe she should explain to the industry minister what return on investment is.... But if she does have a different explanation, I would like to know that.

I would also like to ask her, if she would show up for the two hours in our "finding Freeland" effort, if we could find a way to understand what in the Financial Administration Act allows the minister to commit the government to \$13 billion of spending for this Volkswagen thing beyond the fiscal framework. The minister does not have parliamentary authority to do that because the parliamentary authority that the minister seeks with Bill C-47 is just to amend some financial acts and many acts that have nothing to do with the budget that the minister is....

Perhaps in "finding Freeland" maybe the minister is actually reading the act, Bill C-47, which amends these 51 acts and doing her cross-referencing to the 51 acts to make sure that she understands and prepares herself well for the incredibly insightful questions that I think all parties will ask the minister if and when she shows up on the 16th. We'll be thrilled to have her next week on the 16th for two hours, but for some reason she's unwilling to commit to two hours, which is a small amount of time given the fact that she has that much—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: How many minutes is that?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's 60 minutes. It's 60 minutes for the first hour and it's 60 minutes for the second hour. She had 60 minutes to share on election readiness with Senator Hillary Clinton on the weekend, but didn't have an additional 60 minutes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: How many minutes do you think she spent with Liberal donors?

Mr. Rick Perkins: When conventions happen we know that there are a lot of people who belong to the Laurier Club who get to have special access. The Laurier Club consists of people who essentially give the maximum donation under law to the Liberal Party personally, and they get special access to ministers of the Crown just by being there. In fact, because they have paid the maximum donation under law, they don't even have to pay delegate fees like normal people.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Really?

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's if you can call a Liberal delegate "normal". If they pay the maximum amount in the donation they get to go to Laurier Club events, and of course the minister herself would have been there. She would be a big draw as the Minister of Finance, but we don't know how many of those events they had during the convention because Laurier events are secret. We do not know how many Laurier events were conducted at the actual convention itself.

For some reason, the Prime Minister and the president of the Liberal Party did not share the details of the Laurier Club agenda with me.

Going back to the issue of the bill and ministerial accountability, it's so key. As the Prime Minister's letter on her mandate—and the Prime Minister made a big deal out of making these mandate letters public. These never used to be public. Prime Ministers have always given mandate letters. This Prime Minister, in the context of supposedly open, transparent and accountable government, said this. This letter says that the ministers have to familiarize themselves with “Open and Accountable Government”, which sets out the core principles and standards of conduct expected of them while they are in office.

When you read that interesting document—it was issued in 2015—it says that ministers have to be available and open and attend Parliament and respond to questions. Now, it doesn't say “answer” questions, because they knew ahead of time that answering questions was not something they wanted to do; they just wanted to respond to questions, which is different. I could get into the Webster dictionary difference on that, but I think most people who are watching and listening probably understand the difference between those. That's why we're into this, and that's why these documents are very important—particularly this document, from Treasury Board, which is an additional guide to the “Open and Accountable Government” issued by the Prime Minister in 2015, for which ministers are supposed to be responsible.

These are the Treasury Board guidelines for ministerial accountability, and where I left off was on page 10. I'll leave out and not finish the last sentence of the paragraph I was on....

Okay, by popular demand, I will repeat the last sentence before I go on to the next section of page 10.

The last sentence says, “Ministers remain individually”—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: There may be new members.

Mr. Rick Perkins: There may be new viewers.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Did you tell them how many pages there are in here total?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I've been asked how many pages there are in this document. Apparently there are 55 pages. We're on page 10. For those who have joined tonight, I did a matinee show today, and now I have my evening thing. Usually you repeat the show when you have a matinee and an evening show, but I'm not going to repeat the show. That would be against the rules.

I'm going to continue with the document that's before us that Treasury Board, I think, has set out for ministers to read. I'm hoping it was in their briefing books when they were sworn in. I know it was in ours when we got in, so that we could understand ministerial accountability and, as parliamentarians, how we would hold those ministers to account based on what Treasury Board and the Government of Canada expect.

On page 10, in the second-last paragraph, is the sentence that I read before but I'll read again just to provide continuity:

Ministers remain individually and collectively responsible for their statutory duties and accountable to Parliament

—and that's where we stopped before the break—“accountable to Parliament”. It was actually a pretty good place to stop, but it then goes on to say:

—and the prime minister for the stewardship of the resources and exercise of powers assigned to them.

I will spare members this, because I know some of the members probably don't need to know about the collective responsibility of cabinet. That's in the next couple of paragraphs in this report.

I can circulate it, Mr. Chair, and table it in the committee, if you would like, so that ministers can read the collective responsibility of cabinet at their leisure.

The collective responsibility, of course, is the idea that is the same in a corporation. This is that you, as a collective group or a management team, make a decision and you're expected, regardless of what your view of that decision is privately, to go out and support it publicly. If you're not supportive of it and you just can't do it, you can do as the Right Honourable John Turner did in the 1970s, and resign from cabinet so that you are free to speak your mind.

I'm being asked what John Turner resigned over. He resigned over the issue of deficit spending by Pierre Trudeau. He was a Liberal of principle. That's about as rare as “finding Freeland”.

I will skip that collective responsibility section and go on to the next section on page 11. For the translators, it is entitled, “Individual responsibility of ministers”. This goes to the crux of the sub-amendment and amendment, which deal with ministerial accountability before this committee, which is a committee of the Parliament of Canada. It reads:

In applying the concepts of responsible government to individual ministers, we see that they have responsibility

—that's spelled r-e-s-p-o-n-s-i-b-i-l-i-t-y, for those following at home—

for their portfolios, which can include not only their departments, but also non-departmental organizations, such as Crown corporations.

I think we've seen some of this before in some of the reports. We know that Crown corporations report to various ministers—the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Finance, etc.—and they have various Crown corporations and duties they're responsible for.

There's a whole bunch of stuff here about legal authority, but in the second paragraph under that section on “Individual responsibilities of ministers”, the Treasury Board writes:

A minister's accountability to Parliament for his or her department means that all actions of the department—whether pertaining to policy or administration, whether taken by the minister personally or by unelected officials under the minister's authority or under authorities vested in those officials directly by statute are considered to be those of the minister responsible. If Parliament has questions or concerns, the minister must—

It uses the word “must”, not “may” or, perhaps, “occasionally”. It does not say they show up once a month. It states:

...the minister must address them, providing whatever information and explanations are necessary and appropriate. (This means that accountability always includes answerability.)

That's what we're looking for. It's answerability in this committee by the Minister of Finance for the \$3.1 trillion. It's answerability for the doubling of housing and renting prices. It's answerability for the 10% increase, which now seems annualized and regularized, in food prices. It's answerability for why spending \$3.1 trillion more and never, ever balancing the budget, as the party dictated to the minister, is in the interests of bringing down or will bring down inflation. It's how spending more and putting more money into the economy—from the government taking more money from taxpayers and then borrowing more money on top of that—actually reduces inflation.

That's an economic theory that's new to me. It is a little while since I was in university. I did my MBA not too long ago, but I didn't see in any of the economic texts that a government spending more money reduces inflation. It would be an interesting question under this provision of the Treasury Board, which states, “This means that accountability always includes answerability.”

Here it says “answerability”, so responses are supposed to be answers. I'll leave it to your judgment, if you watch question period, as to whether the government adheres to that guideline from the Treasury Board.

It goes on to state:

If something has gone wrong

—sometimes those things happen. Sometimes departments do things wrong—

the minister must undertake before Parliament to see that it is corrected. And, depending on the circumstances, if the problem could have been avoided had the minister acted differently...

That's an important part of ministerial accountability, when the minister or the department makes mistakes. Parliamentary committees and Parliament itself, in the House of Commons question period, are seeking answers as to whether that mistake could have been avoided in the first place.

This is very important. It's an essential manual for ministers to read. I'm surprised they presumably haven't read it.

Do you know what it says next? If that mistake is made, as Treasury Board says, and there could have been a different decision or outcome for the minister, the next line says, “the minister may be required to accept personal consequences.”

Generally, in a Westminster system, accepting personal consequences.... It's not experiencing it differently; it's experiencing it the same way. If the minister is responsible for the department, then the minister must do the consequences for their actions.

One action that we've seen lately is that the Minister of Finance has supported her cabinet colleague in sole-sourcing contracts to her campaign staff or personal friends to do media training.

Perhaps the media trainers should have gone over what would face the minister should she sole-source contracts to a personal friend. That might have been a good preparation for the minister in preparation for being held accountable in the House.

Now did that minister resign? We've had ministers resign for a lot less. We've had ministers resign for things that cost less than \$20.

Minister Boudria—I digress on these things, but I remember these things—resigned from the Chrétien government because he took a free night at Château Montebello. Some of the members here may have experienced a wonderful weekend not far from here on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River at the Château Montebello where Pierre Trudeau held the 1980 G7 economic summit. It's a beautiful place. Don Boudria took that free night and resigned over a couple of hundred bucks.

But when a minister of this government gives tens of thousands of dollars for sole-source, breaking contracts, the minister just says, “Oops, sorry.”

Now, is that good enough? If your children do that, do you put them in a time out, or do you just say that sorry is good enough?

Well, there are consequences to actions. That's what this says. It says, “the minister may be required to accept personal consequences.”

I believe that when they wrote this, they meant that personal consequences weren't just an apology. It's something more. It's standing up and saying, “Do know what? I erred twice. I did it the first time as a mistake; the second time it's a habit and needs to be corrected.”

The best correction is to resign, but that hasn't happened for the Minister of International Trade, who used to, by the way, work in the Prime Minister's Office for this Prime Minister with the person who she gave the contract to, who also used to work in this Prime Minister's Office. Perhaps Pomp & Circumstance kept her from doing the right thing in resigning and Pomp & Circumstance advised her that the best thing to do was tough it out, so that Pomp & Circumstance could get more contracts in the future.

The document says, “Ministerial accountability does not require that the minister be aware of everything that takes place” in the department.

I will go on to say that it continues on the top of page 12 to say, "To support a minister's accountability for a department, the minister and his or her deputy must work together to understand the level of detail at which the minister expects to be involved in the department's work."

You know, some people want to be briefed and want to know every detail of everything that's going on when they run part of an organization. Some are happy just to get a two-page briefer. As Jean Chrétien required, nothing should ever go to the prime minister that's more than two pages because that's the attention span.

The current Prime Minister's chief of staff said before a parliamentary committee.... She came before a parliamentary committee for two hours; she's generous with her time. The ministers of the Crown and the Deputy Prime Minister, though, apparently don't have the time to go to committee to the same extent.

We calculated that \$8 billion is what it would cost for the minister to come to committee. Maybe that is too much of a price to pay. I don't know.

This report says on page 12, "Accountability and blame are different: blame applies only if problems are attributable to the inappropriate action or inaction of the minister."

I don't know. Sole-source contracts to one of your best friends seems like something the minister did.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Are you talking about Mary Ng?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It was the Minister of International Trade and her former work colleague, good friend and campaign manager. It was the Pomp & Circumstance company. That's where we're full of pomp and circumstance in this government.

That's how you get a \$9,000-a-night vacation, presumably, or a \$6,000-a-night hotel room in London with a butler and a piano so you can sing *Bohemian Rhapsody* if you are the Prime Minister of Canada. Pomp & Circumstance must have done the booking in advance on that because why else would you use a company called Pomp & Circumstance than to go to Britain and deal with the pomp and circumstance.

This goes on to say in the second paragraph:

whatever the level of detail at which the minister becomes involved, the minister and deputy have a complementary responsibility to ensure that appropriate systems are in place to manage the risk of problems and to correct them when they occur.

Ministers are similarly accountable for the exercise of the authority by the deputy minister

I spoke earlier on the Al-Mashat affair. Remember when I was reading several nights ago from that excellent Library of Parliament report on ministerial accountability? There was a discussion in that paper about Al-Mashat, the former long-serving Iraqi ambassador to the United States for Iraq during the first Gulf War.

There may be people in this room and even members of Parliament who weren't even born then, but you need to know history. It was in 1991 just for clarification, and some of the members here were toddlers.

That Gulf War was when Iraq invaded the sovereign nation of Kuwait and the "coalition of the willing" came together. They came together under the leadership of the first president Bush and under then-prime minister, Brian Mulroney, to push back a despot in Saddam Hussein out of an independent country. Saddam Hussein's ambassador to Washington was a fellow named Al-Mashat and Al-Mashat decided that he wanted to emigrate to Canada; who wouldn't, really.

Even if you're an ambassador in Washington with the fancy life, the cars, the limos, and the expense accounts that an ambassador gets, Al-Mashat decided he wanted to come to Canada. The immigration minister of the day, who I happened to work for, said no, but he got in anyway. I was talking about this with the Minister of Immigration today, actually, just before a vote, we were talking about ministerial accountability in the immigration department. I informed him that the reason that all of the people in the embassies abroad now work for the immigration minister, and not Foreign Affairs, is because of this ministerial accountability issue around Al-Mashat.

At that time all of the people who processed immigration applications were actually foreign service officers. The deputy to the deputy minister then, known as the associated under-secretary, was Raymond Chrétien. Surprisingly, if you haven't heard of Raymond Chrétien, Raymond Chrétien was the nephew of the then-Liberal opposition leader, Jean Chrétien, future prime minister of Canada, who had decided through various Liberal channels that the best thing to do was to take Al-Mashat and send him off to Belgium, have him processed and put in, in spite of the fact that the immigration minister had said no. You know, what the heck. What's the point of being the 2IC, as the bureaucrat in charge of where foreign service officers go on their postings, without having the ability to actually tell one of them what to do.

The poor immigration officer who was a foreign service officer for the Department of Foreign Affairs gets a telex—back then it was telex—from the person who decides whether his next posting is Paris or Mogadishu. What is a telex? Back to this thing about some of my colleagues only being a few years old in 1991, a telex was how embassies communicated to each other back then because the Internet was in its infancy. It's like a telegram.

The guy in charge of deciding, Raymond Chrétien, the nephew of the opposition leader, on the request of the former Liberal ambassador to the United States, a buddy of Al-Mashat, a fellow named Allan Gotlieb, requests that the poor, lowly, officer in the Belgium embassy of Canada process this application. Guess what? That poor, young, foreign service officer, didn't choose to listen to the immigration minister, who had said no to this person coming in, but chose to listen to the person who decides whether he gets to go to Paris on his next posting. It's human nature, I guess, so he processed him. Little did all those people know that one month later that immigration minister would become the foreign minister.

That foreign minister would read in *The Globe and Mail*, much as we're reading today about Chinese interference, because apparently *The Globe and Mail* learns about it before the Prime Minister. *The Globe and Mail* then published a report that said that, in the middle of a war with Iraq, Canada had allowed their ambassador into Canada and given him landed immigrant status. It's phenomenal, really, when you think about it. The Immigration minister said no, so what is a minister in accountability supposed to do?

This is really what this is about, the issue of ministerial accountability. The ministers of the day said.... This is why it was in that insightful Library of Parliament report. I know the library because of my interventions the other night and again today. They will probably want to revise this report to include more detail on this initiative, and I'd certainly be willing to spend time with them to explain it.

The minister is still alive. Her name is Barbara McDougall. I can't go on without a statement here mentioning that the Honourable Barbara McDougall, who happened to be my boss back then, experienced this. She didn't experience it differently, it was.... Well, I guess she did. As Immigration minister, she said no, but the department and the bureaucrats in External Affairs experienced that command by the immigration minister differently and said yes.

The minister of Immigration, as I was explaining to our current Minister of Immigration today in question period.... The new foreign minister said, "You know what? I'm never gonna let this happen again," and made all of those foreign service officers no longer diplomats with all the status that comes with diplomats. They are now and have been ever since employees of the Department of Immigration. They weren't happy about that, but they are now in Immigration. They still are.

The reason that our current Minister of Immigration has an accountable task force of people throughout the world to execute on his strategy and this government's strategy on immigration and to implement the exceptional processing of immigration in Canada that has led to 2.4 million people being in our backlog.... That exceptional efficiency is because the minister has clearly marshalled his resources accordingly, but he has all of these resources around the world, and do you know what he has that they didn't have back then? He has computers, Internet and things like that to keep....

Back then, everything was done by paper. The immigration backlog back then, when we were allowing 200,000 people into the country, was 40,000 people. Can you imagine a world with only 40,000 people? I think the Minister of Immigration should be added to this motion to account in this budget for the changes, because there are changes in this omnibus bill to immigration rules and citizenship. I don't know how we're going to get through this in two hours.

That is a bit of a digression from the Treasury Board report.

I will skip down a few paragraphs in the interest of time. On page 12 it says:

Ministers are said to be *answerable*, as opposed to accountable, with regard to the day-to-day operations of arm's-length organizations in their portfolio. This means, for example, that if questions were raised in the House—

It's hard to raise questions in the House in our search for finding Freeland. Six days and five months....

I was trying to figure out yesterday why the minister was there in the House, and it dawned on me. I looked at my calendar. Do you know what happened between last week and this week? It's a new month. It's the month of May, so it's the monthly appearance of the Finance minister. It sounds like—she's promising at least—this may be an unusual month of May, the merry month of May, as it's called in the song in Camelot.

We're going to have a second presence of the minister, at least for an hour anyway or, as one committee member on the government side put it, she has been here in the past for at least an hour. I don't know. Maybe she misspoke, because I don't think she's ever been here for more than an hour. The proper English explanation of that would be that she was here for an hour, if we're going to be factually correct, and we're just looking for two hours. It's a small amount to be worried about.

The last paragraph on page 12 says, "An important dimension of accountability is the capacity to respond when issues arise." Fifty-one acts being amended is an issue that has arisen, so the dimension of accountability is obviously important, according to Treasury Board.

The report goes on:

Accordingly, with respect to matters arising under the watch of a previous minister

—well, that's not the case here—

the current minister, rather than the previous minister, is accountable for answering to the House....

We see that every day, obviously, with some of the issues going back to the Minister of Public Safety. Some of these things go back to the previous Minister of Public Safety, who sits silently in the House as the current minister, sadly, has to defend that record. The previous minister used to be the police chief of Toronto—

An hon. member: You don't hear much of him anymore.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, you don't hear much of him, although while he was police chief of Toronto, it was said that he was in the pocket of the union, that he was totally in the pocket of the union and wasn't much in management.

I see that every day as the shadow minister for Innovation, Science and Industry. I see that my counterpart minister actually said something contrary to this when asked why this government approved the takeover of Canada's only lithium mine, a critical mineral, without a detailed national security review. Under the green strategy that this government approved in 2019, they approved the takeover of that mine by a Chinese state company, but 100% of the production of that Manitoba mine goes directly to China. So much for the critical mineral strategy of this minister of industry.

When I asked him about it, he said, “Well, it wasn’t me. That was the other guy”, who happens to be working at Rogers now with a big fat paycheque.

He said that before, so I asked him why the government had allowed China to acquire a company out of Vancouver called Norsat, which also owns a company in Toronto called Sinclair Technologies, which are both critical telecommunications companies. In 2017 the previous minister of industry in the Government of Canada allowed that to be taken over by a company called Hytera. I know where Hytera is based. I know you guys know, but I’ll just say it for those watching: It is based in Beijing. It’s a state-owned company.

Canada allowed a critical telecommunications manufacturer in Canada—two of them, in fact, with one in British Columbia and one in Toronto—to be acquired by company called Hytera, a Chinese state-owned company, and do you know what? That previous minister never asked for a detailed national security review.

That is puzzling, because 2017 is the year that the supposed Government of China legislature in Beijing passed their national security law. Do you know what that national security law says? It says that if you are an individual who works in China or is a resident of China, or you are a company headquartered in China, it is your duty to steal all of the technology and secrets from other countries and other companies. It is your duty as a citizen. In fact, you are breaking Chinese law if you don’t do that.

In 2017, when that law passed, we then allowed them, without a national security agreement, to buy two telecommunications companies. What’s the effect of that?

The minister, in his accountability, said, “Not me. That was the guy before me.” The guy before him happens to have been in the same cabinet with this minister when this minister was the foreign minister; perhaps, as foreign minister during that time, he could have actually raised his hand at the cabinet table and said, “Wait a minute. Maybe we should do a national security review.”

This is about ministerial accountability and the lack thereof in this government. I know everybody watching and listening is enraptured by this story of the incompetence of this government in doing national security reviews and being accountable for its decisions. Decisions have consequences, intended and unintended. The consequence of this was that this company won two contracts in Canada by low bids. By low bids, they won a Government of Canada contract.

Let me tell you which contracts they were—well, let me stop there before I tell you. I’m going to keep the contracts a mystery for now, but I am going to tell you that in January 2022 Hytera, the Chinese state-owned enterprise that had been allowed to buy these Canadian companies without a national security review, was charged with 21 counts of espionage in the United States of America. That great conservative, that paragon of conservative values in the United States, President Joe Biden—

I’m being corrected. I’m sorry. I misspoke: He is a paragon of socialism. The Democratic president in the United States, apparently a left-wing fellow himself, actually banned Hytera from doing business in the United States.

This comes on the heels of their also banning Huawei, which is still doing research projects in Canadian universities. Perhaps the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Finance could come together to this committee on this budget presentation and explain why Huawei, contrary to what the minister says publicly, is still doing research in Canadian universities. It’s incredible. We had testimony in the science and technology committee just two weeks ago on the number of projects that Huawei is involved in, but in the spirit of ministerial accountability, the Minister of Industry—who is responsible for giving Canadian taxpayer money to universities for research—says, “Oh, that’s not my problem. I can’t control everything the universities do.” However, he does control the money that goes into those research grants.

In the 1993 election, Jean Chrétien famously said, “It’s easy, that helicopter deal. I will just put zero through the contract.” Well, it’s very easy for Minister Champagne. He represents the same riding as Jean Chrétien did, Shawinigan. Jean Chrétien was the little guy from Shawinigan, and this is the effervescent guy from Shawinigan. All he can do is say, “Zero contracts go to Huawei in Canadian universities”, just like his predecessor in that riding said about the helicopters. Then he ended up buying the same helicopters afterwards, and breaking the contract cost \$1 billion, but I won’t go there.

Now, I know everybody is waiting to find out the contracts that Hytera won. I’ll tell you that after they were banned in the United States, Hytera won two contracts in Canada. One was with the RCMP. It was not with just Procurement Services Canada or with Immigration Canada or with Environment Canada; they won it with the RCMP, one of our primary security agencies. When the minister comes here next week, I’m sure she should be able to answer why a company charged with 21 counts of espionage in the United States and banned from doing business in the United States was granted the ability to install telecommunications equipment for the RCMP across the country.

We did have a special meeting, and I have to say I put forward a motion in the industry committee and asked the Minister of Public Safety, who does not report to the industry committee, to come to the industry committee and explain this. Do you know what happened? The Minister of Public Safety actually came to the industry committee. He actually showed up for questioning in the industry committee.

I think he should invite our Minister of Finance in our effort for finding Freeland. Maybe he could be an ally in getting the minister to come here, in finding Freeland.

An hon. member: Do you think that will happen with the leadership race?

Mr. Rick Perkins: If there is a leadership race, I think there might be a little bit of a division. I can see it already.

However, what he did was he explained. He said “Hey, Rick, good news. I know you guys raised this issue. I wasn't aware of it, but the good news is that the piece of equipment that Sinclair is installing was installed across the country for the RCMP, but it doesn't hook into any of our computer systems, and there was an RCMP representative with that person every time, just to make sure they didn't monkey with the RCMP security equipment.”

There may be people out there who feel reassured by that, but I wasn't. No, I wasn't reassured.

I said to the minister, Minister Mendicino, “Let me get this straight. Minister Mendicino, you are saying that a Chinese state-owned company got access to the physical communication spaces where all that RCMP hardware is located across Canada. They may have been watched to make sure they weren't hooking into it or planting a bug, but they do have GPS on their phones. I think they could figure out exactly where the key RCMP communications equipment is if the Chinese government wanted to interfere with it. Do you think that is good news, Minister?”

An hon. member: What did he say?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I've been asked what he said. He said he never thought of it that way. Well, okay.

Then I went on to say, “You're also responsible, are you not, Minister, for the Canada Border Services Agency?”, and he said yes.

Again, this budget bill, Bill C-47, allocates changes to some of these security acts.

I said, “Then you're aware that the Canada Border Services Agency had a contract with Hytera.”

By the way, do you know how Hytera wins these government contracts?

An hon. member: How does that happen?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's because they're the lowest bidder.

I looked at Hytera's financials, because Hytera claims to be publicly traded on the Beijing stock exchange, which I'm sure is a stock exchange with the highest ethics and security in the world. The Minister of Public Safety or the head of the RCMP, like anyone else, could google it like I did. It took me about five minutes. It does require you to understand some basic financial definitions of numbers, like what a return on investment is, what a capital expenditure is or what a balance sheet or an income statement is. I'm not sure every one of the ministers can do that.

Let me underscore that this investigation took 10 minutes, and I don't have the entire security apparatus of the government of Canada available to me. It showed me that Hytera does not make a profit. In fact, they lose money every year. If the profit motive is not the issue that drives that company, what could possibly be their other motive in wanting to own telecommunications companies in Canada? They are winning with low-cost bids and underbidding companies in Canada that have to bid and make a profit. I have not had an opportunity to ask that question.

It is baffling that the Minister of Finance.... When she comes here, maybe she could answer why we think that's a good expenditure of taxpayers' dollars, because they now have access to the Canada Border Services Agency. They have access not only to the RCMP's telecommunications; they have access to know where our communication facilities are and what equipment is in the Canada Border Services Agency.

I know there's an old poetic saying that “consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds”. Perhaps I have a little mind when it comes to consistency, but I expect consistency. This government is consistent, I can tell you, because while we search in the “Finding Freeland” episode or perhaps the “freeing Freeland” episode, I'm hoping the PMO is freeing Freeland so we can find Freeland. I'm hoping the Prime Minister's Office has done that.

I can tell you that the Minister of Industry is consistent with what we've heard from the Minister of International Trade, who I know sits just behind him in his seat in the House, where she said basically, “Oops—not my problem that I gave sole-source contracts.” Do you know what Minister Champagne said? “Oh, sorry; that's the other guy, not me. I know I served in cabinet with him and I know I was around the cabinet table.”

As we've heard, collective decision-making is part of the parliamentary system. Each minister is responsible for the decision that other ministers make, and we understand that this is the way it operates, but in the guise of collective responsibility, we have a collective lack of responsibility: They blame the other guy.

I'm sure we're going to hear that because Stephen Harper did not bring in a bill to prevent Chinese state-owned enterprises from buying Canadian companies, it's not the Liberals' fault as a government that they didn't do a public safety check on these companies. It's not their fault, because if only Stephen Harper had brought in legislation to make sure it was mandatory to do it, then they would have followed the rules. Because they've been in power for eight years, they certainly couldn't be responsible for not thinking in the last eight years that this was something they should do.

In fact, for public security options in any acquisition over \$512 million by a state-owned enterprise, the minister has an option, every minister has an option. As Brian Mulroney said to John Turner in the 1984 election debate, “You had an option, sir.”

Canadians deserve better. You could have gotten rid of the old Liberal ways. You could have brought in a new standard of ethics and have said, “I'm responsible for this and I will make sure it never happens again, and every single state-owned enterprise of China will get a national security review because, first and foremost, I care about that”. But why would you if you were aware for two years that China had been interfering in Canadian elections, had actually been intimidating the family of a member of Parliament and you did nothing about it?

Apparently, that's Stephen Harper's fault too. It's Stephen Harper's fault that, eight to 10 years ago, he didn't pass a law that compelled these Liberals to actually say that when a member of Parliament is intimidated by a foreign country you're compelled to tell them about it. You can't just sit on it and benefit from that in an election; you have to actually do something about it. In the eight years this government has been in power, they chose not to do that.

We know that every sparrow that falls from the sky for this government is Stephen Harper's fault. I would like to lay claim to that quote, but that quote comes from a member of Parliament named Roy MacLaren, a good Liberal and a former trade minister under the Trudeau era, who during the free trade debate in 1989 said, in a rare show of honesty for a Liberal in the House of Commons, that we will blame every sparrow that falls from the sky on Canada's free trade agreement. You will remember that the Liberals opposed free trade back then, and they ran an election against it in '88, they ran an election against it in 1993, and they said that they would tear up the free trade agreement and they would get rid of the GST.

I have a question for everybody here. Do we still have NAFTA? Now it's called CUSMA, USMCA, NAFTA 2.0. Apparently, they're quite proud of that, the NAFTA. The last time I checked I think we still have the GST.

It pains me to say this, but after the 1993 election, there was a Liberal minister who had integrity. I'm shocked I'm saying this about the Right Honourable Sheila Copps. Sheila Copps was Jean Chrétien's deputy prime minister, a long-time Hamilton, Ontario MP. In the 1993 campaign, like every other Liberal, she promised to get rid of the GST. Then, shortly after that election, there was a summit of the three amigos, as they were called, the president of the United States, the president of Mexico and Jean Chrétien as the newly elected prime minister. You would have thought Jean Chrétien had invented NAFTA and invented the GST and embraced it, so in a rare move of integrity—although it wasn't a very risky move given that Sheila Copps had represented that riding for many years in Parliament, for many years in the provincial legislature, and her father had been the mayor of Hamilton, if you didn't know that—she resigned her seat. No, she didn't resign her seat to go back to some private practice, she resigned her seat to run again in the by-election.

This was a big risk for somebody who had represented it federally and provincially, and whose father had been the mayor—a very big risk. I'm not sure the last time a Tory had run that riding, but she did it anyway, and cost the taxpayers' money, but she is the only Liberal who resigned her seat. You'll be shocked to learn she won the seat in a by-election. You know what? That is a minister who, according to this Treasury Board guideline and the open and accountable guidelines for ministers of 2015 for this government, actually lived up to her commitments.

To get back to this primary issue of how does Parliament—and I know everybody watching out there is asking this—hold a minister to account, I can tell you that I know.... I can hear the Liberals here in the room telling me that they want to know how Parliament holds a minister accountable.

This Treasury Board document, for the sake of the translators, is called “Meeting the Expectations of Canadians: Review of the Responsibilities and Accountabilities of Ministers”.

I will refer the translators to page 15. Section 2.2 is entitled “Parliament's role in holding the government to account”. This, perhaps, will be guidance for those ministers that are now—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order, Chair.

The bells are ringing and we do not have unanimous consent, so we need to suspend.

I hate to do your job, but evidently you're not doing it.

The Chair: It's been called for, Member.

The bells are ringing. I'm looking to members for unanimous consent.

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: We'll return after the vote. We're suspended.

● (2000) _____ (Pause) _____

● (2105)

The Chair: We're back.

MP Perkins, the floor is yours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Again, the point needs to be made that it would be very straightforward to move on with the important work the finance committee does if the finance minister would simply articulate that she is willing to come and speak for two hours.

I am wondering, Mr. Chair, whether you've heard from either the clerk or possibly the finance minister and Deputy Prime Minister on whether she would simply be willing to commit to coming before this committee—if she were asked, of course—for those two hours. It is a fairly straightforward request.

Mr. Chair, on this point of order, I would ask that you share with the committee—or consult with the clerk on—whether or not we have heard that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will come for two hours to defend her budget before the finance committee of Canada's Parliament.

The Chair: MP Kurek, just to reiterate.... I think you asked the same question just before we went to the votes, or a little before that. Right now, what we're on is a subamendment to the amendment of MP Blaikie, which is, "That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023."

The minister has emailed the committee and said she would like to appear this upcoming Tuesday, which is May 16, MP Kurek. That is the information—

Mr. Damien Kurek: Just to clarify, does this email include a willingness for...two hours?

The Chair: It is that the minister will appear before committee on May 16.

Now we are back to MP Perkins.

You have the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think this is my third set for today on this.

Mr. Chair, you summarized the situation well in our "finding Freeland" exercise, and, in particular, I would like to say that one of the reasons we like to ask the Minister questions with regard to this budget bill, this bill that amends 51 acts of Canada and spends \$3.1 trillion, is that Canadians are suffering because of the high costs of everything, in particular, housing. I know many members of Parliament who have been grappling with this issue of high-cost housing.

I would just like to bring to the committee's attention something that I would love to bring to the minister's attention, were she to come here for two hours to discuss the impacts of this government's budgetary process on housing.

A recent report on housing affordability by the Royal Bank of Canada is entitled, "Buying a home has never been so unaffordable in Canada", which I think is really true. There are four opening summary points to the more detailed report, which I'm sure members will like to hear in order to understand the types of questions that could be asked if we had a bit of freedom for Freeland to come here to committee and actually answer questions for two hours as parliamentary accountability, which is the purpose of both the subamendment and the amendment by Mr. Blaikie. The reason this seems to be a challenge is that, in the last six months, there have been three invitations to the Minister to appear.

For those who are watching and aren't familiar with parliamentary process, committees can only request that a minister appear. The minister does not need to feel compelled to appear, but out of parliamentary tradition and, quite frankly, because of the open and accountable government document that all ministers are required to review and understand released by this government in 2015.... This document, referenced in every single mandate letter of every minister of this government, says that ministers must make themselves available for questioning both by Parliament—that would be the House of Commons—and the Senate, as well as by the parliamentary committees that are tasked with examining government legislation and policy ideas.

This is the finance committee responsible for going through Bill C-47, the budget implementation act, which amends 51 acts of the Government of Canada. In this accountability, some of the areas that we've approved include this concern, while Canada's leading bank that says that buying a home has never been so unaffordable in Canada. In the summary here, there are four points.

The first one is:

Surging interest rates drive ownership costs to record-high levels: The Bank of Canada's rate hiking campaign since March has added hundred of dollars to mortgage payments

That would be the previous March in 2022. In some cases, as we know, it's up to \$7,000 a month "that comes with a home purchase. This, along with the jump in property values during the pandemic have made it more difficult than ever to become a homeowner in Canada."

I see that we're joined by a number of young people here who are working on the Hill for the summer, some very bright and intelligent interns. When they graduate and enter the workforce, I'm sure they hope to own a home. That's the dream of everyone, yet this RBC report says that dream is out of reach. As our leader, the next Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Poilievre, says quite often, it's become out of reach for new homeowners. Indeed, "RBC's national aggregate affordability measure reached 60% in the second quarter, surpassing the previous worst-ever point (57%) in 1990."

Now, in 1990 there was another global recession. It was a difficult global recession and led to double-digit interest rates, causing massive issues with affordability. It wasn't like the early 1980s recession under Pierre Elliott Trudeau, when mortgage rates reached 21%, if you can believe that—21%. These rates only reached 12%, 13%, 14% in the early 1990s, a relative bargain compared with what happened under Pierre Trudeau, and they obviously make the current situation look less drastic. But if you are entering the housing market now with some of the highest housing prices in the world, two of the biggest housing bubbles in the world are in Toronto and Vancouver, and so this, combined with the double whammy or perfect storm, if you like, of high interest rates is going to make it virtually impossible for that dream of home affordability.

The second point of RBC is in the summary is that affordability worsened everywhere in Canada: "The deterioration over the past year has been off the charts in most markets in most markets with only parts of the Prairies and Quebec having experienced deeper erosion in the past."

I live in rural Nova Scotia and we have a housing crisis in every part of rural Nova Scotia. Some people think this is only a big city issue, but it's an issue everywhere. We've seen soaring housing prices in rural Alberta, in rural Canada. I'm sure all members from rural ridings around this committee will acknowledge that they receive those calls every single day.

The third point is of particular interest to some of colleagues: Ontario and BC buyers are extremely challenged. Banks can sometimes be the centre and focus of understatement and I think “Ontario, BC buyers extremely challenged” is perhaps an understatement. RBC goes on to say in that bullet that “Conditions are still manageable in the Prairies and most of Atlantic Canada and Quebec though.” I tend to disagree, as these regions have lower average household income and there are fewer household opportunities to buy, to purchase a house. Yes, the housing prices in parts of my riding may be at levels that seem ridiculously low compared with Toronto and Montreal, or even Vancouver, but when the median income in my riding is \$30,000, a \$200,000 to \$400,000 home at these interest rates is out of range, just unfathomable to most people, forcing them into rental units, if you can find one.

The largest community in my riding—I would like to ask the minister about this—is called Bridgewater and the Prime Minister will be familiar with Bridgewater, as will the industry minister because they were just there a few parliamentary breaks ago making an announcement with one of our employers, Michelin. A one-bedroom apartment on the main street above a retail store starts at \$1,200 to \$1,500 a month, so if you think it's a bargain to live in small town rural Atlantic Canada, it is not. Yes, the rents are not huge like in Toronto, but the income levels are relatively lower too and make it more difficult.

The fourth point RBC makes is that “Home price declines [will] eventually bring relief to buyers”. That's what we all hope. They say:

The sharp housing market correction that began this spring is rolling back some of the spectacular price gains made during the pandemic. We expect benchmark prices to fall 14% nationwide by next spring—more so in Ontario and BC. This should help lower ownership costs next year. But the likelihood of further rate hikes from the Bank of Canada is poised to intensify affordability pressures before then

—which we have gone through—

more so in Ontario and BC. This should help lower ownership costs next year.

Unfortunately, counterbalancing that—perhaps levelling out in some markets a lowering of some of the higher-end products—are higher interest rates, which doesn't make housing any more affordable to the new homebuyer.

These things are the questions we would like to ask on affordability when housing prices, whether you rent or buy, have doubled under this government. But we can't get to ask those questions if the Minister of Finance has been present at question period only six times since January and has not shown up, has blown off, one might say.... In fact, I said in question period today that the minister has blown off the last three invitations from this committee and has not bothered to come to those hearings.

We're only asking for two hours of her time. I would remind the Minister of Finance that the spending arm of the government, the Treasury Board, has a policy document on ministerial accountability that I'm sure she has read, but isn't listening to.

For the translators, on page 15 of that document, section 2.2, is called “Parliament's role in holding the government to account”, and it says:

Parliament's role, on behalf of Canadians, is to hold ministers to account for the activities carried out under their authority or those authorities vested directly in departmental officials. Ministers, in turn, need to assure themselves that structures and processes are in place to give them the appropriate degree of control, which includes ensuring that their deputy is managing the department well enough to support ministerial accountability.

It goes on to say that “Parliament has a broad range of means to hold the government to account. The oldest and still among the most powerful is control of the public purse—the exclusive right to authorize taxation and the expenditure of public funds. In support of this responsibility, Parliament audits the accounts of revenues and expenditures in a manner of its choosing.”

Now, let's just stop there. Let's take a look at Bill C-47, the budget implementation act. By its very nature, the purpose of the budget implementation act, and the examination by this finance committee with the minister, is to do precisely what Treasury Board says our job as parliamentarians is: “The oldest and still among the most powerful is control of the public purse—the exclusive right to authorize taxation and the expenditure of public funds.” That is our duty as parliamentarians. It's to scrutinize the spending plan of the Government of Canada, in this case as exemplified in Bill C-47: “In support of this responsibility, Parliament audits the accounts of revenues and expenditures in a manner of its choosing.”

There's a footnote on that. It's footnote 11 at the bottom of the page:

See Norman Ward. *The Public Purse*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951, pp. 3–4, for a statement of the core principles and practices of parliamentary control of finances. Part IV of the Financial Administration Act sets out the manner in which the Public Accounts are to be kept, subject to the regulations of the Treasury Board

To go back into the document, it says:

Other means include Parliament's role in the passage of legislation, the scrutiny and approval of public expenditures, debate over resolutions, and the provision of information, whether through Question Period or formal reporting.

There's a footnote here on that sentence:

Based on Peter Aucoin and Mark D. Jarvis. *Modernizing Government Accountability: A Framework for Reform*. Canada School of Public Service, 2005, pp. 20–21.

This is a fairly commonly written-about thing:

Parliament audits the accounts of revenues and expenditures in a manner of its choosing. Other means include Parliament's role in the passage of legislation, the scrutiny and approval of public expenditures, debate over resolutions, and the provision of information, whether through Question Period or formal reporting. Three areas warrant specific attention: Question Period, the scrutiny of the government's performance by parliamentary standing committees (particularly the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts), and the role of the auditor general.

Toward the bottom of the page, there's a new section under 2.2 entitled "Question Period". As I think I've said before, in our effort to find Freeland we've been disappointed by the fact that there have been six appearances in Parliament. We were hopeful that there would be a seventh, since she was there yesterday, but apparently a seventh was not possible today. We live in hope that there may be an appearance tomorrow, but Wednesdays are the Prime Minister's question period, so it's not terribly useful if she shows up then. We cannot pose questions to the Minister of Finance on a Wednesday in the House of Commons. We are reliant on the other days for the minister to be present and/or in committee here, as this report says.

For those who are unfamiliar, the Treasury Board guidelines say this about ministerial accountability in question period:

Question Period is a distinctive feature of Westminster democracy and arguably its most powerful instrument of accountability.

We had the President of the United States here recently, and we had secretaries of state, their cabinet, who are not elected. They are appointed by the President and ratified by Congress, but they are not elected individuals. They marvel that ministers in charge of departments have to actually be held accountable on a daily basis in question period. It's what I think makes our system so much superior to a republican system like the U.S., that daily our ministers are held to account by other elected people—not by the media when you show up and do a press conference, and not by the media when you are at an event and scrum afterwards, but by people duly elected to hold you to account. As this paper says, "A centrepiece of parliamentary life, Question Period gives parliamentarians timely"—the key is timely—"opportunities to challenge policies and raise questions about administration."

This is Treasury Board now. It's the Government of Canada. This document says:

Ministers are obliged to be present in the House of Commons to respond to questions, to account for the authority that has been assigned to them, and to defend the way in which they or their officials have exercised authority.

At the bottom of the page, just so the translators can follow along, we find footnote 14. The footnote to that important direction from Treasury Board states:

Ministers have a duty to attend Question Period daily. See Canada. Governing Responsibly, 2004, p. 16. Any proposed absences must be cleared with the Prime Minister's Office before other commitments are made. When a minister is absent, a designated minister or parliamentary secretary answers for him or her.

Of course, for the past number of months—we're in month five, I guess, since Parliament came back in January—we've seen six days with the Minister of Finance and all the rest answered by somebody else. Sometimes I have the feeling when we're in the opposition and asking questions of the Minister of Finance, who clearly has been given permission, according to this, by the Prime Minister to not actually attend to earn her paycheque, that—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*] responsible?

Mr. Rick Perkins: According to these academic studies, the Prime Minister is responsible for giving clearance and saying that the minister only needs to be there once a month in order to collect her paycheque.

An hon. member: But if he's not here [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, I've been asked by a member present in the committee how that happens when the Prime Minister himself has some challenges in that regard in terms of attending question period during the week. It's a good question. It's one I'd like to pose, perhaps, to the minister if she came to committee: How is it that in the expenditure of tax dollars to pay your paycheque, you have been given permission to actually be absent and not present in most of the last five to six months?

Some of you may recall that famous debate by that great, great NDP leader Jack Layton. By the way, I knew his father, Bob Layton. I know that Jack Layton didn't advertise this in Parliament, but Bob Layton was elected in 1984 as a member of Parliament from a riding in Montreal in the massive Brian Mulroney sweep of 1984, when he won 211 of 282 seats. I think MP Blaikie's father was elected in that election. In this case, Jack Layton's father was elected and Brian Mulroney put him in the cabinet. He was the Minister of State for Mines.

In the cabinet shuffle in 1986, when my boss was moved out of junior minister of finance over to the role of privatization minister, Mr. Layton unfortunately was not in that cabinet then, but he eventually became caucus chair. I know that he was very proud of his son, who started the White Ribbon campaign to end violence against women after he left public office. I know, because I talked to him many times when he lived in Toronto, how proud he was of his son Jack.

Why wouldn't he be? Jack Layton fought over four elections as the leader, I think, although I stand to be corrected. In 2011, in the debate against Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff, this is what he said to Mr. Ignatieff: You know what? You have the worst attendance record in Parliament. People expect you to show up to work to get paid, not to get paid to stay home or do whatever you're doing. They expect you to show up when you get paid. You haven't been showing up. You have the worst attendance record in Parliament.

I would hope that the members of the NDP caucus, when they're having discussions on their supply arrangement with the government, would raise these concerns about the fact that the Minister of Finance seems to suffer from Ignatieff syndrome, that being the inability to find your way to Parliament Hill. It seems to have afflicted the Minister of Finance. I don't know if it's a communicable thing and like COVID was passed from person to person and got passed through the NDP caucus. Obviously, the part of Mr. Layton's admonition of the Liberal leader for not showing up to work hasn't been a communicable virus that spread to the Liberal cabinet, or we would see the Minister of Finance more frequently. We all know that we would appreciate her presence more to answer questions, as Treasury Board says we should.

This Treasury Board document, which is only 55 pages, says the following at the top of page 16:

Any member can ask any minister any question about his or her area of responsibility, without advance notice. By questioning ministers, parliamentarians hold the government to account in ways that apply appropriate political pressure, especially by raising public attention to a problem.

In some ways, I guess, we're doing that now in this committee. We're raising public attention to a problem. Not only is it a problem that the finance minister just says "yes" when asked to spend more money, because there is no plan to balance the budget, but we're also raising attention through this. We've been asked why we're doing this and why we'd like the minister here for two hours. It's because we'd like to raise public attention to the fact that we have a truancy problem in the House of Commons.

Yes, truancy; you remember that. I would never have spent a lot of time skipping classes. Far be it from me to do that.

An hon. member: I think you would have, though.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I might have, but just a few. I was more concerned with sports than I was with that, personally.

An hon. member: I'll bet you got in trouble for talking in class, too.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I did get in trouble for talking in class. I admit it. I'm guilty as charged. But truancy is an issue when you don't show up. We know that the people who didn't show up in class were generally the underperformers. Not showing up at class is not only an underperformance; it also contributes to your continued underperformance in the future.

I think that's why "truancy" is an apt name for this bill. This is a bill from a truant finance minister who, if we'd been able to hold her to account, might have been more sensitive to the needs of Canadians and other communities and their concern about how these spending pressures are driving up their everyday costs.

When you're not available to have those questions asked, and when you're not held accountable, it's sort of like, as somebody recently said—perhaps it was in question period today—when you're trying to find Nemo or on a search for Freeland; sometimes with the responses in question period, because the Minister of Finance isn't available, it's like we're playing whack-a-mole. One minister pops up here to answer a question on finance, and then the Minister of Sport gets up and answers a question about the budget even though the Minister of Sport is not responsible for the budget. Then the Minister of Public Safety will get up.

These are kind of odd things, because we aren't seeing, in some cases, that they are personally responsible. We do know, though...and I could go back, if you wish, to the parts of this paper that talk about the collective responsibility of cabinet ministers. Maybe that's what they're doing. They all feel that they're just as responsible for this mess as the minister.

They are collectively like those times in high school when some folks were truant and would come back and say, "Can I have your notes? Maybe I'll be able to write the mid-term test with your notes." It feels to me like these cabinet ministers are keeping the notes for the finance minister, but something's getting lost in translation when they're giving those notes to the truant finance minister.

An hon. member: Truancy or "trud-ancy"?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It could be "trud-ancy", but I won't say it's "eel-legal". She can be absent if she chooses to, if the Prime Minister gives her that permission, and I guess he has.

So any member can ask any question of any minister any time about her area of responsibility. Now we come to another really important section of this Treasury Board document that I know you're all waiting for. It's called "Committee review of government spending". I know you're riveted by that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: [*Inaudible—Editor*] of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. They weren't alive during his.... So if you could mention that—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I've had a special request—and I do take special requests—about a fellow named Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

I never met him personally. I was far too young. He was the father of the current Prime Minister.

For the young folks in the room, just to let you know, the father was prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and then again from 1980 to 1984. In 1968, fresh-faced—sounds familiar—with Trudeaumania—sounds familiar—Pierre Elliott Trudeau, having had the party depose unceremoniously Prime Minister Pearson from the job, sort of in the way the Martin people did to the Chrétien people, as new Liberal leader, with all his vim and vigour and the great enthusiasm and optimism of our country after its centennial, said he would not run deficits and that the Government of Canada was not a Santa Claus.

That's what he said in 1968: that the government is not Santa Claus. After all those years in power and the loss of his finance minister because of the spending, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau built up \$468 billion in debt—\$468 billion—and now the son has build up over \$700 billion.

The easiest way for young folks to understand the Trudeau legacy is that the two Trudeaus, the father and son.... The son committed the same sins as the father in oh so many ways—but we'll just stick to financing—and contributed \$1.1 trillion in debt that the young folks in this room and their grandkids are going to have to deal with. Their grandkids are going to have to pay. It won't be me and it won't be the members around this table who are going to have to worry about this record spending, the \$1.1 trillion in Trudeau debt and borrowing: It will be them and their grandkids. I feel sorry for them.

That's a bit of a digression, but I did take a request.

It will be felt from all three oceans, the north, Vancouver and Vancouver Island: I think there's change. The wind is blowing in Vancouver Island right through to the eastern tip, the closest point to Europe in North America, in the wonderful province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The importance of what we are here to do on accountability is exemplified very well in the following paragraphs in this Treasury Board document that deals with ministerial accountability and committee review of government spending, which, after all, is what Mr. Blaikie's motion and Mr. Beech's original motion are about. They are about accountability on this budget.

For the sake of those following at home, this Treasury Board document on page 18 reads as follows, and this will be new to some people:

The Estimates process is fundamental to holding the government to account and is linked to Parliament's control over the public purse. The government can raise revenue and spend or borrow money

—this one certainly borrows money—
only with the authority of Parliament.

I digress, but I will for a moment. As we approached COVID, this government actually tried to usurp Parliament on its spending pressure authority. It wanted to get a blanket authority to be able to spend and borrow whatever it wanted for two years without Parliament's sitting. There's a fellow named King Charles I, not King Charles III, but King Charles I, who lost his head due to parliament because of such an attempt. Now, we would not suggest that we do that....

Was it King Charles II? I've been corrected by MP Blaikie. It was King Charles II who actually lost his head, but nonetheless it was a King Charles. Now, I'm not suggesting that this is what would happen to our new King Charles as a result of that. I'm not. I am quite proud of the Charles III pin I wear, but ultimately it's not a great consequence of trying to usurp Parliament's authority, as this government tried to do. Thankfully, due to the efforts of a very strong opposition by all parties, we did that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: What about the Magna Carta?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I've had a request to talk about the Magna Carta, and I must say that I think our leader is perhaps a greater expert on the Magna Carta than I.

I'll continue with this paragraph, the first paragraph of "Committee review" of governing documents:

Parliament exercises authority over government financial administration through enabling legislation, such as an appropriations act, and by reviewing financial documentation, such as the Main Estimates (parts I, II, and III) and the Public Accounts of Canada.

We're told we can't use props in the House but we can use props here. I think this is an adequate prop. Do you know what? I'm not even sure the Minister of Finance could count all of the pages in this act it's so thick and big, amending 51 acts, but we're trying to hold her to account in a measly two hours to ask a few questions.

"In the Main Estimates," as this document says, "the government presents Parliament with spending proposals for a fiscal year and provides details on individual programs and on the plans and performance of departments and agencies."

It is true that the estimates do not amend things, as this supposed bill does, such as the design of the king's crown in an emblem for our new king. That supposedly changes some of the symbols from what they were. Some religious symbols are being removed to, I assume, make it a non-sectarian sort of thing and they are being replaced with a snowflake. Snowflakes are replacing the images of a snowflake. That aside—

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I have a point of order, Madame Chatel.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you. I want to remind my fellow members what we are talking about.

[English]

I would like to mention that on this point of order we are not talking about Charles III or snowflakes or fisheries. We are talking about a motion to invite the Deputy Prime Minister to appear for two hours in front of this committee. We have also learned that she's willing to come on Tuesday. I would really like to invite my colleague to continue the debate on our motion as amended by the NDP to invite the Deputy Prime Minister to come and appear in front of this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Chatel.

Mr. Damien Kurek: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Again, just keep it relevant, MP Perkins.

Go ahead, MP Kurek, on a point of order.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would ask the honourable member if she would simply share with this committee whether or not the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance would be willing to come to this committee for a very reasonable two hours.

Certainly I know Mr. Perkins and other Conservative members would be happy to get on with the business of this committee. We think it's entirely reasonable that the Minister of Finance on a budget that spends almost \$500 billion would come to this committee. I'm just curious whether that member heard from the Deputy Prime Minister that she would in fact be willing to come to this committee for two hours when she indicated her availability to appear next Tuesday.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Mr. Yvan Baker: That is not a point of order. What Mr. Kurek raised is not a point of order. What Ms. Chatel raised in her point of order—I'm weighing in on her point of order—was a valid point of order that the Standing Orders require members to speak to the topic at hand, and Mr. Perkins is not doing that.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Baker would be welcome to answer the question too.

The Chair: MP Kurek, it is about the relevance of the point of order.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I don't understand why these members are wasting the time of the committee.

The Chair: MP Lawrence, we'll get back to relevance here. I will repeat for MP Kurek that if this came to a vote, it would be a vote on having the Minister of Finance invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that the appearance would be scheduled to be on or before May 18, 2023. We have received an email from the minister that she would be willing to appear on May 16, which is next Tuesday.

We go back to MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the points of order by the government members. Perhaps they missed my earlier link, which helped explain how this was relevant, so I will revisit, for the benefit of the members who raised the question, what is actually being amended in the 51 acts in this bill. In order to provide a little bit of variety, I will start at the back and work to the front.

To the most immediate question that the member asked about King Charles III—

The Chair: MP Perkins, could you stop for a second?

Members, I am getting some concern and feedback here from the interpreters about what was happening with MP Kurek and the speaking over other members. Please stop the chatter and the crosstalk between each other and allow MP Perkins to talk. Let's have one speaker at a time and no more crosstalk. It's affecting the interpreters. We would not want to affect their health and safety, I would think.

MP Perkins, please continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. It is a valid point. I thank the interpreters for their diligent work during this time. I've tried to be very open and to help them with it by providing them with some of the documents I've gone through in respect for their jobs. I appreciate that.

To the various points of order—

The Chair: On that note, let's just be respectful of the interpreters. Let's have no more crosstalk and no more talking over or in between. Let's just allow one member to speak at a time.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There were a couple of specific questions on the point of order on how King Charles III related to this bill. Let me quote from division 31.

This bill is broken up into 39 divisions, as they call them, in the act, in Bill C-47. Division 31 is on amendments to the Royal Style and Titles Act, which has to do specifically with Charles III and nothing to do with raising revenue or expending money, and it has nothing to do with borrowing, yet it's in this omnibus bill. I was speaking towards the relevance of this bill.

Perhaps it would be helpful for members if I went through all of these sections so that they understand all of the various things that are in this bill that are unrelated to financing.

If I start at the back, this bill amends the Canada Elections Act. The Canada Elections Act, last time I checked, was not part of spending, borrowing or raising revenue.

It creates a new body called the "Employment Insurance Board of Appeal". Generally, that would be done through an act of Parliament on its own if the government wanted to seek it, remembering that this government and this Liberal Party opposed omnibus bills in the 2015 election. In fact, most of the members from the government side campaigned on that in 2015, but apparently that's here.

There are amendments to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Again, it has nothing to do with raising or spending money.

There are changes to the Criminal Code of Canada. Perhaps it would be helpful, too, for members of the government to understand that this supposed budget bill amends the Criminal Code, which I don't believe is a factor in raising revenue, spending money or borrowing money.

It creates the "Canada Growth Fund". I can agree with you there: A commitment of somewhere between \$8 billion to \$15 billion—we don't quite know yet because we haven't been able to ask any minister about this—to create the Canada growth fund is in this bill. That is definitely spending: spending without actual knowledge of what the thing will be, which is a habit of this government.

If I continue to go back, I mentioned the Royal Style and Titles Act in division 31.

You're not going to believe this, but the bill amends the Canada Post Corporation Act. I don't think the government needs to go to Parliament to raise the price of a stamp, so what could they possibly be doing in putting a change to the Canada Post act in a bill that supposedly is about the budget?

I will go on, since the question was asked by government members about the relevance to these things that are obviously not apparent even to them in terms of why they would be in an act of Parliament.

Division 28 calls for changes to the Food and Drugs Act (Cosmetics Testing on Animals). We all appreciate that, if we can, we wouldn't want animals used in cosmetics testing, but again, that should be a separate act of Parliament, not in a budget.

For those members who are confused about these issues and why anyone would want to question the minister about why these are in her bill, I can understand why government members are confused, because I don't understand why they're in a budget bill either.

Division 27, just one above that, is again on the Food and Drugs Act, but no, it's not the same thing. It's another thing on natural health products. They'll need to amend the Food and Drugs Act to tax more, which I know this government likes to do, but they're making amendments to that.

We all know that Canada is lagging the world in intellectual property in terms of patenting, seeing as China filed 350,000 patents at the world trade patent organization last year while Canada filed 32,000. We're making amendments in this bill to the Patent Act.

I should say as an aside that of China's over 300,000 patents filed worldwide, 35,000 were for artificial intelligence. I guess because the Liberals are so good at math they would know how many patents were filed by Canada last year for artificial intelligence at the world trade IP organization. Unfortunately, I don't see any Liberals across from me raising their hands and saying they have the answer. Let me help you: 12. Twelve, so the Patent Act changes here, hopefully, will get us up to maybe doubling that to 24, while China continues to put in 35,000 a year.

The National Research Council Act is amended here. Again, if the government were to provide the National Research Council with more money, it would not require a change to the National Research Council Act. It just requires a ways and means motion in the House.

Division 24 changes the Customs Act. I suppose the Customs Act might be changed in here to increase taxes. That could be a legitimate purpose.

Now, I know that all the members travel a lot and that all the members have constituents who travel a lot. We know—and it's been in the news a lot—about all the transport complaints. Liberal members might say, “There he goes again, way off topic, and why isn't he sticking to the topic of holding the minister to account for her budget bill?”

In fact, the Liberals would be wrong and I would be right, because I've actually read this. It says in division 23 that there is a new portion called “Air Travel Complaints”, and the one above it has changes to the Canada Transportation Act.

Now, we appreciate that there needs to be better rules to protect consumers on air travel, but if you really believed in this, you'd give it House time on its own for parliamentarians to question that act and make sure that the best legislation to protect consumers was available. You would not put it in a budget bill that gets closure at all stages. Members on the government side don't even know that this bill is being used for that.

Moving on to the oceans protection plan, the member asked me earlier why I would ever talk about fisheries. Well, don't get me going. With 7,000 commercial fishermen in my riding, and having defeated the fisheries minister because of her performance in fishery under this government, I could talk to you for days and days on the

fishery. You might say that's not relevant to this act, but it is, and I can tell you why. Division 21 in Bill C-47 amends the oceans protection act.

I'm not even sure how many government members are aware that there's an oceans protection act, but the amendments here are to do things in the oceans protection act around the protection of certain ecosystems. As valuable as that may be, that should be a bill on its own if it's so important. This is supposedly the government that is committed and at the forefront and full of virtue signalling on the environment, and yet they have buried in a bill that amends 51 acts changes to the oceans protection plan. I would think they would want to be proud of that.

Things that swim in the ocean, such as elvers, lobster, pelagic fish.... For all you landlubbers, a pelagic fish is a fish with a fin that swims—like cod, like halibut, like hake, and like any number of fish. Shrimp, which are shellfish, swim in the ocean. Do you know what also swims in the ocean? Mammals called seals—pinnipeds. Part of the oceans protection plan is to protect the biodiversity of the oceans. When the largest predator is allowed to exponentially grow in the ocean without any kind of management plan under the oceans protection act, which is amended by this bill, you have a biodiversity imbalance.

The government talks about wanting to respect biodiversity except when it comes to pinnipeds, seals and sea lions—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I have just a quick point of order, I guess.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm just wondering how many resources we have, as we are running short of time. I know that we might be able to continue until 2 a.m. or 3 a.m., if that's possible.

The Chair: Yes, well, we still have some time, so I'll let you know.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Oh, great.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead. You can continue.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

So I have some time to talk a little more about what falls under the oceans protection plan, which is amended in this bill. It's a thing called a seal, as I said, or a pinniped. For those of you who don't know, it's the only thing in the Atlantic Ocean that we don't hunt commercially anymore, because they were cute and used to fund—

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: The oceans protection plan, that's the source.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Madame Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: We are discussing a motion to invite the Deputy Prime Minister to come to this committee. She is willing to come. We can go on and on and talk about seals, but that's not what Canadians want.

Can we please talk about the motion? Then we will be able to invite stakeholders and talk about section 41 and talk about fisheries with them if we want, but now there's a motion and we need to debate that motion.

An hon. member: On that point of order—

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chatel.

On that point of order, we are discussing, as MP Chatel said, the main motion, then the amendment and the subamendment. The amendment was that the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18, 2023.

We have received an email from the minister saying that she would like to appear this upcoming Tuesday, on May 16.

An hon. member: Just not for two hours.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's not a point of order, Mr. Chair. I respect the member. The budget is—

[English]

The Chair: MP Lawrence, it was a point of order. It's about relevance.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: My comments are relevant to the amendment. The budget is a very lengthy document, and Mr. Perkins is talking about finances, fisheries and seniors. It covers a lot of topics.

[English]

The Chair: I would say just do a refocus there, MP Perkins, and maybe with a little time this evening you'll have an opportunity to think about that refocusing.

Members, we'll be suspended until Thursday.

Thank you.

[The meeting was suspended at 21:59 p.m., Tuesday, May 9]

[The meeting resumed at 11:04 a.m., Thursday, May 11]

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

We're resuming meeting number 87 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the debate on motion by PS Beech, the amendment by MP Blaikie and the subamendment by MP Morantz in relation to the study of Bill C-47.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. There is interpretation for those on Zoom. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either the floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For the members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as well as we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

I do see a hand up with MP Baker, but I do have the speaking order right now. I have MP Perkins, MP Lawrence, MP Baker and then MP Blaikie.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Can I ask you to read the amendment we're dealing with? We're still speaking to the amendment, are we not?

The Chair: You're speaking to the amendment and the subamendment by MP Morantz. If you would like to read it into the record or speak to it, go ahead for those watching.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I won't perhaps bore those watching with the thing. It does feel to some members as though I have been speaking for all 87 meetings of the finance committee, but it hasn't been that many.

Just to sort of summarize, for those watching, what I've been speaking about is the desire to have, under this subamendment and amendment to the main motion by Mr. Beech, what we believe to be an important discussion about ministerial accountability to Parliament. We, as the official opposition, have been requesting that the Minister of Finance come in on her Bill C-47, which is the budget implementation act. It's an omnibus bill that amends 51 acts of Canada, some of which have to do with finance and some of which don't. We've been seeking two hours for the minister to speak on a fiscal plan that was presented to Parliament, which plans to spend \$3.1 trillion in the next five years.

I understand that the minister has agreed to appear—which is heartening, because we have been in search of Freeland—but will commit to only one hour instead of two. This whole discussion about ministerial accountability could be solved right now if the minister agreed to appear for two hours, which we've been unable to get confirmation of. Perhaps some of the members of the government or the chair could confirm whether we've received an update from the minister as to whether she's agreed to come for two hours as opposed to what she said in her last email, which I understand—

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order....

Mr. Terry Beech: I just want to clarify for my friend across the way, because I don't want him to be confused, that the Deputy Prime Minister responded to the invitation that was part of the motion that we all passed, which had no specified time. The will of the committee to invite the minister to appear for two hours is in fact the amendment that you've been actively filibustering for 23 hours or so. If we can vote, then we can send the invitation and then we can see what the response is.

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, on that point of order

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Perhaps the chair could confirm whether any amount of time has been committed to by the finance minister with respect to her invitation.

The Chair: What I can tell the member is that the minister has emailed the committee and has accepted the invitation to come in on May 16, which would be next Tuesday.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: So no time has been committed to. I have respect for the parliamentary secretary, and I believe he's in the same party as the finance minister. I would suspect they communicate on a regular basis, or I would hope so, for the functioning of our government. If he is willing to guarantee today on record that she will be here for two hours, we can move forward.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, obviously committees are independent. It would be improper for a parliamentary secretary to go against the will of the committee, so once we have the vote of all members and we understand the will of the committee, we'd be able to act.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech.

We go back to MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It sounds as though we are in a bit of a chicken-and-egg scenario. I personally asked a question to the government in the House on Tuesday, a simple question, "Would the minister be willing to appear for two hours?" and unfortunately, the minister was unable to answer that question, not because she said something else but because the government had the Minister of Tourism stand up and answer the question.

I was quite happy that the Minister of Tourism had clearly read some of my interventions and mentioned the important issue of the lack of policing of elvers as one of the things we had discussed, which is going on. By the way, the Minister of Fisheries got another email this morning, 25 days after the shutdown of the fishery, after 24 emails on the rules on the elver fishery not being enforced. In fact, the RCMP is refusing to take calls now across my riding in the detachments. The media is even calling them, and the RCMP is saying no.

Maybe I'll come back to that, because I want to make sure those who are watching understand what this is about and the importance of this. We are skeptical and we wonder if the reason we can't get a two-hour commitment from the minister when she wants to spend \$0.5 trillion per year—\$3.1 trillion over the next three years—is perhaps that she is embarrassed at such a bad budget. In the fiscal plan outlined only six months ago—we haven't seen her in six months—the minister projected we would have a balanced budget within the five-year fiscal framework. That is now not actually projected.

I guess that at the Liberal Party convention she had advance notice of the resolution, which was defeated. Perhaps she played a role in defeating it. It asked for the government—their own party asked for the government—to present a plan to balance the budget, and in the wisdom of the Liberal Party of Canada, they thought that was an unreasonable request from their own members and defeated it. Perhaps that's why the minister won't come to defend this bad budget for two hours.

I mentioned she hadn't been here in six months, so I just want people who are watching to understand what that means. Three times over the last six months the committee very pleasantly invited the minister to appear. As I said in the House, she blew off every invitation, so what were those invitations for ministerial accountability about? That is what the subamendment and the amendment are about, to try to put some accountability into MP Beech's motion.

On February 2 this committee invited the minister to appear in the same meeting as the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Tiff Macklem, to discuss inflation, probably the most important issue to Canadians right now. Without a doubt, it is the most important issue to Canadians. People are suffering under the food inflation caused by the spending in this fiscal plan. Food price inflation of 10% has been normalized, which is causing people to have to choose—and we all get calls every day from people—between heating their home—or even having a home—and eating. They are having to put water in their children's milk—a terrible thing they are facing now with regard to what this government, which purports to care about Canada's less fortunate people, is actually imposing: The greatest burden of financial harm in this country because of their lack of recognition of what the spending is. Perhaps that's the reason we're having trouble finding Freeland in this committee, because maybe she does not agree with the budget that she had to present. Maybe it was the issue that was raised a few meetings ago, that this is really about freeing Freeland—to do what she thinks is right—from what the PMO dictates.

As we know from the Treasury Board document I read earlier, absences have to be approved by the Prime Minister's Office, and clearly they've been approving a lot.

The second invitation was made on March 7, when the committee invited the minister to appear to defend her main estimates. For those who don't understand what those are, the main estimates are the actual spending plan. The budget is a budget. It's a broad, big document that sets out what the government expects revenue to be; where they plan to spend money, and what they think the economic projection for the economy is that will result in this supposed performance.

By the way, the government has missed every single target in every single budget that was set out. You can remember this fine document that I think about 130 Liberals were elected on in 2015. Remember when they used to talk about working for those who are in the middle class and those who are aspiring to get there? I think they've adopted a new slogan: They're trying to deal with the middle class and those trying to stay in it, which is more and more difficult these days because of this bad budget.

The minister clearly didn't want to come here to actually defend the actual spending plan. It's like your chequebook. Where did you write your cheques? The estimates say that "here is where we're going to actually write the cheques", and in micro detail by department. Every minister usually gets called before their respective committee to defend estimates A, B and C a few times a year. Incredibly, unbelievably and against what "Open and Accountable Government" of 2015 says on page 2, as produced by this government in the sunny ways days of the government:

Ministers are accountable to Parliament for the exercise of the powers, duties and functions vested in them by statute.... Ministers must be present in Parliament to respond to questions on the discharge of their responsibilities, including the manner in which public monies [are] spent, as well as to account for [their] use.

The budget is the plan of how they want to spend it. The estimates are how they account for the use.

Those are things that this government and this Prime Minister have said that all ministers had to do. In fact, if you read the mandate letters of each minister, including this minister, on page 2 of the mandate letter, it actually refers to this document, because the world all ties together, I guess. It says:

Open and Accountable Government sets out [the] core principles and...standards of conduct [which are] expected of you and your office.

If the minister didn't read this document, I hope the minister read the letter from the Prime Minister to her, dated December 16, 2021, setting out what her mandate is as Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister of Canada. It says that "you have to live by these rules", and these rules say that you've got to show up to work, you can't be truant and you can't blow off an invitation to talk about inflation and be a credible finance minister.

You can't blow off an invitation from this committee to come here and defend your estimates—one of the most fundamental parts of every minister's job—and be a credible minister of finance. You can't blow off the April 20 invitation in relation to the pre-study of this budget bill, but yet the minister blew off all of those invitations in her five...wait, I'm sorry, six appearances.... The calendar flipped to May, so we've had the monthly appearance this week of the minister in QP. I'll correct some of my earlier statements. When I made them, she had been in the House five times. Now it's six. We were living in much hope that the "finding Freeland" exercise was over, but apparently the "finding Freeland" exercise continues.

We respect that the minister has a busy schedule. We all have busy schedules as members of Parliament and, certainly, I would think that anyone with the important position of Deputy Prime Minister has that. We know that the minister has had a lot of time for travel. Only a few weeks ago, the minister was in Washington. Perhaps she flew commercial. Perhaps she flew on a government jet.

We don't know. Maybe we should ask, but we can't, because she's not here.

When she flew to Washington, she was commenting in a big public policy forum and a panel. She likes to be on panels. She did two this past weekend in Ottawa, but apparently the 10-minute walk from the Hill to the Shaw Centre was too much to ask. I know that she doesn't have to walk, because she does have a taxpayer-paid car and driver. She could have driven here and spared us a few minutes to talk about the budget, but her time was allocated to how to win elections and Hillary Clinton on a panel.

She has that busy schedule, but the minister hasn't been here. The minister has made herself available to answer in QP on only 11% of the sitting days. Perhaps her pay should match that, but no, I think she's receiving a full paycheque of almost \$300,000 a year, plus expenses, and showing up to work 11% of the time. As Mr. Blaikie often reminds me, Jack Layton once said to Michael Ignatieff that Canadians pay you to show up at work, so maybe you should.

Just to reiterate—because I know that sometimes it's hard to count for some people in Parliament, so I'll make it easy—for the number of appearances in question period, I can give you the dates, and you only need one hand: January 30, February 13—this year, by the way—March 10, April 25, May 1 and this past Monday. I suspect the minister was here this past Monday because she couldn't get a flight out of town yet with all the Liberals leaving town from the convention, so she had to stay an extra day.

Otherwise, I'm sure she would have been somewhere else and she wouldn't have graced us with her presence then, but she did, yet still, in the "finding Freeland" exercise for this flawed and failed budget, she is unable to attend this committee.

I don't know; maybe somebody on the government side could let us know, perhaps, where the minister is today. We'd be more than willing to have her come today. I'm sure she doesn't need to spend weeks preparing with her deputy minister. I'm sure she understands every aspect of the 51 acts of Parliament that she is proposing. I know she has an in-depth knowledge of the changes to the oceans protection act, which this budget bill changes. I know she has an in-depth knowledge of the new bureaucracy being proposed for the employment insurance proposal. I'm sure she will be more than willing to explain why a snowflake should be on the crown of the....

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: The Prime Minister...?

I would ask the minister, if she is in town, to come and do this. I will come back later to this issue of the Treasury Board document that I know everyone was on the edge of their seat to hear the continuation of today. I can understand why the minister may not want to be here, because she did promise us restraint. Her economic policies are driving up inflation. They are driving up groceries.

We understand that there are now 1.5 million Canadians needing to use food banks. That's a record. I know that people want to get a world record when they're in the Olympics, but I'm not sure this is a record that one would want to seek, to have record levels of food bank usage. I believe she owes it to the 20% of Canadian families who are skipping meals because of this high cost of food to come here and help us understand how pouring gas on the inflation fire will actually lower food costs so that they don't have to make those choices. I believe she owes it to the nine out of 10 young people who believe they will never own a house because of the housing crisis that we have.

I think it's time for the minister to stop hiding. I think it's time for the minister to come here and defend her failed budget. I think it's time for Canadians to perhaps go on social media, use the finding Freeland hashtag and take pictures so that we can find out exactly where she is.

I will stop there for now, Mr. Chair. If you could put me on the bottom of the speaking list, I would appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Perkins.

We have MP Lawrence, MP Baker, MP Blaikie, MP Chambers and then MP Perkins again.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: If it's agreeable to the chair, I'd like to give my slot to Mr. Chambers.

The Chair: No. I will go next to MP Baker.

Go ahead, MP Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Mr. Chair, I've been waiting to move an amendment to the motion over the course of the filibuster. Given that I haven't had the opportunity yet, and it's relevant to the discussion occurring right now, I want to advise members of the committee that I intend to move the following amendment when we've had a vote on Mr. Blaikie's amendment.

Here's what I would move. I would move that the motion be amended by adding after section (b)(ii) the following: "(iii) if the Committee has not completed the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, May 26th, 2023 all remaining amendments submitted to the Committee shall be deemed moved; the Chair shall put the question, forthwith and successively"—

Mr. Adam Chambers: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Yvan Baker: —"without further debate on all remaining clauses and proposed amendments"—

Mr. Adam Chambers: A point of order.

Mr. Yvan Baker: —"as well as each and every question necessary to dispose of clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill, as well as all questions necessary to report the Bill to the House and to order the Chair to report the Bill to the House as soon as possible".

I wanted to give advance notice of this amendment so that members understand—

Mr. Adam Chambers: I have a point of order. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I believe we are debating a subamendment, and it's not appropriate or allowable for a member to move another amendment while we're doing so. I'm not sure that's relevant to this subamendment.

The Chair: MP Baker, I don't think you said "move". You said you were giving notice—

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm trying to give notice of an amendment.

Mr. Adam Chambers: On that point of order, Chair—

The Chair: It is relevant, and, MP Chambers, you've done it yourself. Others have done it here in the room.

MP Baker, you still have the floor.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Chair. I'm making sure that members are aware of the intention here, so I'm giving notice. I'm not moving it. I wanted to give advance notice so that members can understand our intent going forward in this debate.

I believe that the current filibuster, which has seen us lose 20 hours of committee time that could have been spent hearing from witnesses, is indicative of the need to set a deadline for clause-by-clause to be completed. This amendment mirrors language from the motion we adopted during last year's BIA, following a Conservative filibuster last year.

I believe we need this deadline, because without such a deadline, we're likely to see another filibuster during our clause-by-clause review of the bill, which would result in a delay to the supports that are in the budget implementation act: things like dental care or other measures that are going to help, the affordability measures that are going to help Canadians. We would see a delay in these supports being delivered, and it would impact, of course, the rest of the committee's schedule.

I'd be curious to see where members stand on this amendment in the context of our current discussion about the subamendment and clause-by-clause, and I look forward to moving it when the Conservatives are prepared to allow a vote on the invitation for the Deputy Prime Minister to appear for two hours, which is an amendment that we support.

I have provided the text of the motion that I gave notice on to the clerk in both official languages as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Baker.

I believe the clerk has received it and has distributed it.

Next on my list, I have MP Blaikie—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: On a point of order, just to be clear, that closure motion is not in order at this point, because we're discussing—

The Chair: It is relevant and the member was just giving notice.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: But you can't bring a motion, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: No. The member was just giving notice of it, and it is relevant.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: He didn't have to give notice anyway because we're discussing it.

Mr. Yvan Baker: On a point of order, Chair—

The Chair: On a point of order, I have MP Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: —the Conservatives continue to raise points of order. They have spoken for basically all of 20 hours, minus a few minutes when our members have been able to speak, and for most of those 20 hours, they've discussed nothing to do with the motion that's being debated.

Now I've raised a point that is relevant. I've not moved it. What I'm doing is procedurally correct. I'm simply giving an indication in the context of our current debate, in the context of this amendment and the subamendment, that this is our intention. I want them to know what I plan to move when they end this filibuster and allow us to go for the vote, so that we can get the BIA passed and get Canadians the supports they need that are available in the budget but won't be available if we don't get the BIA passed soon.

That won't get passed soon if the Conservatives continue their filibuster.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Baker.

I am going to suspend for a bit just to confer with the clerk.

• (1125) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1130)

The Chair: We're back.

It is relevant. The notice is relevant. MP Baker can do that. It has been distributed by the clerk and all members should have received it in both official languages, I hope.

We left off with MP Baker.

MP Baker...?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Chair. I have said everything that I wanted to say.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go back to our list. I have MP Blaikie, then MP Chambers and then MP Perkins.

Go ahead, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I trust I'm coming through on the microphone now.

I have been listening—obviously for some time—to the proceedings of the committee and have learned a number of things about the east coast fishery, which is nice for a Prairie boy.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It's certainly not my area of expertise, but I understand that in the Second World War Prairie boys actually were more likely to sign up for the navy than anyone else in the country, and I think there is a certain fascination that one has with things that are so different from what you know, coming from the Prairies.

In fact, my grandfather did exactly that. He grew up in Biggar, Saskatchewan, and joined the Canadian navy. The Canadian Naval Air Group was his beat, so I've been happy to indulge similar sentiments during the course of Mr. Perkins' remarks, let's say...

How's that for diplomacy? I think pretty good, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I would have to agree.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: But I do, at this point, want to take a moment to express some frustration. I had hoped that we would get to a point where we could find a way forward as a committee. As much as I've been enjoying some of Mr. Perkins' remarks, I would like to hear from Canadians about the content of the budget bill.

For instance, I know that many people have been frustrated at airports. There's a proposal in this bill to fix up the air passenger bill of rights. Frankly, it's one that I don't think is adequate. I've been doing some good work with my colleague Taylor Bachrach, the NDP transport critic, who has a lot to say, and rightly, about the government's proposal on the air passenger bill of rights. I'm looking forward to Taylor suggesting some amendments to the bill. I would prefer that we get to hear from folks who are experiencing these challenges in airports. I'd prefer to hear from folks in the industry about how we can improve that. We're not able to do that if we don't find a way to resolve the filibuster.

I share Conservatives' frustration in the minister not agreeing to come for two hours. I think that would be helpful. I understand why my colleagues across the way are frustrated with the way this has gone down and the Conservative choice to filibuster. But I would really like for us to find a way past this.

We've all talked about the excise tax around this table. While we didn't get a freeze on the excise tax, the budget implementation act does lower the excise tax increase to be consistent with the inflation target rather than actual inflation, which in the current context is a good thing. I think it definitely will be a benefit to local breweries and vineyards that have been concerned about the outsized excise tax increase that they will otherwise face if this committee can't find its way to doing the work that has properly been assigned to it.

I think about some of the information-sharing provisions that are important to the implementation of the dental care plan. Conservative colleagues have rightly pointed out that the attestation method of delivering a program does have a lot of pitfalls. I think it's important that we move past that. Some of the legislative proposals in this bill are meant to move the dental care plan out of an attestation and payment model into a permanent program model where Canadians are able to go to the dentist, get basic dental services, and have those directly paid instead of sending a cheque and having to pay it themselves.

I think we're working toward a better model. It's a model that I want to see and that I'd like to see applied universally to Canadians. I don't expect everyone around the table to agree with that, but I do think that if this is a democratic forum, we should be able to get to the point where we get to make decisions about that as people who are duly elected to represent our constituents, and to make those decisions around the table. We haven't been able to do that, because we haven't been able to get to a vote on anything.

I think of some of the anti-money laundering provisions in the bill. I think of the increase in the tool deduction for tradespeople, which, as an electrician, is something I can definitely appreciate that people would value. We need to get on to the study of the bill and have the bill pass in order for Canadians to get the benefit of these things. I also think of some of the provisions in here that will remove tax from veterans benefits. Again, while I can appreciate that my Conservative colleagues might not be crazy about the whole package, that's something that I think is a good thing and we should be moving forward with.

The question isn't about how we get to the point where everybody around this table agrees with everything in the bill. I don't think we're going to get there. We don't have to get there. As Conservatives like to remind us when we talk about the electoral system and our Parliament, we live in a majority decision-making context. That's what the House of Commons is. You need a simple majority to decide virtually every question, but we have to be able to put the question in order to make those decisions.

At a certain point, having a minority of people on the committee hold up the possibility of making a decision at all, simply because they don't like the decision that's going to be made or because they want this thing or that thing, becomes a problem for the whole artifice of Parliament.

You know, I respect the right of members to filibuster. I certainly respect it more when there's an obvious point to the filibuster—when the body that's being filibustered has the power to grant what is wanted. This committee doesn't have the power to compel the minister to appear for two hours. It simply doesn't have that power. It never has had that power. Unless we substantially change some of the basic principles of the Westminster parliamentary system, we will not have that power. I think we shouldn't be in a position of having to contemplate that, because I think the minister should just come for two hours, for Pete's sake—like, we're there—but we can't do that around this table.

What we can do is invite Canadians from civil society to talk about their concerns about the bill. They can talk about their concerns in both the negative sense, in terms of wanting to see change,

and the positive sense, in terms of the way in which the bill addresses some of those concerns. We can't do that if we're going to sit here day in and day out.

Originally, the motion we're amending and then subamending talked about a goal of 20 hours of study. Well, we've spent the 20 hours. We could have spent the 20 hours with real people, talking about their real concerns with regard to what's in the bill or not in the bill. Instead, we've spent the 20 hours listening to a handful of the same people talk about a small subset of issues.

I say this with all due respect to my colleagues. I'm frustrated. I'm not angry. I support the right of parliamentarians to engage in this kind of activity, but I would ask that there be a more obvious point to it and that when they want something and they filibuster on it, they do it for something that the committee can actually deliver rather than something that we can't compel. Then we could deal with it around this table. We could get it done. We could move on. But as long as the filibuster is going to be about something that is outside the power of this committee to compel, we're stuck. We're stuck. I find that frustrating. I would much rather have spent this time listening to others about the bill proper.

I think we're at the point where we are running out of time. Some of these things that I mentioned earlier need to be in place. Dental care is a priority for the NDP and it's a priority for me. I want to get done what we need to do in order to be able to institute that program on a better basis than the attestation basis. I am concerned about doing that. I will do what's within my power to get that job done, among some of the other things that are in this bill that I think are important, but we should do it with time to have a process.

Everyone around this table knows that the most valuable commodity on Parliament Hill is time. Money is important. Many things are important. But the real currency on Parliament Hill is time, and we're pissing it away right now. If we want to value the study of this bill, we do that with time. If we want to get this bill passed by the summer in order for some of these things that need to be in place to move ahead, such as a reduction in the amount that the excise tax will go up by, then we have only so much time between now and when the House rises.

We are making a choice right now—I would say our Conservative colleagues are making a choice for us—on how that time gets spent. I don't think they're making a good choice. I am happy to be part of conversations, and I have been part of conversations, to try to break the impasse. I will continue to show up in good faith to conversations to try to break the impasse, but at the end of the day, there's not a lot that I can do unless others are willing to play ball.

I certainly hope we can find a way to break the impasse, because I want to hear from Canadians on the bill, the good parts and the bad parts, and I want to ensure that the shenanigans at this table don't prevent some of the concrete benefits of certain things in this bill from proceeding. I think we're up against the clock in that respect. I really beseech my colleagues to find a way to move forward instead of leaving us stuck in this position for another 20 hours or whatever it's been. It's been about 20 hours, give or take, right? Let's not do another 20. That's the time we have to talk to Canadians about the bill.

Let's use it, please.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blaikie.

I have on the speakers list MP Chambers and MP Perkins.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I always find the interventions from my NDP colleague to be fairly persuasive on a number of matters.

He and I share a similar frustration: I would much rather be listening to witness testimony.

I apologize to Mr. Baker. I believed that he was trying to move the amendment, but I now realize that it was just a notice, which I think is in order, and my apologies for the point of order.

Mr. Chair, I'll provide notice of a subamendment to Mr. Baker's proposed amendment, which is "May 26" being moved to "June 8". When we get there, that subamendment will be made to Mr. Baker's amendment.

I will also give notice of another amendment that I would seek to move once we get out of this rabbit hole of subamendments and amendments, which is to have the chair draft a letter to the Prime Minister's Office that asks that the Deputy Prime Minister be freed up to appear for two hours.

Mr. Chair, we've entered something of a twilight zone. We are now at a point where the government would love to see the filibuster continue.

Let me explain. The answer that the minister has not confirmed for how long she might be available is a little too cute by half on behalf of the government. If the minister were available for two hours, I think she would say that she's available for two hours, but to suggest that the minister is unaware that she's being requested for two hours because she hasn't been formally invited I think is quite disingenuous.

As I mentioned in my intervention last meeting, which I think sent shockwaves through the buildings of downtown Ottawa—in particular the former Langevin Block and the Prime Minister's Office—there are multiple ways in which this impasse can be resolved, and one of the simplest and easiest ways is a confirmation from the finance minister that indeed she is available for the two hours.

I don't think there needs to be a motion from the committee to change the invite, but perhaps I'd just simply ask the chair, have we asked for how long the minister is available or have we just sent the invite? I think we could pretty quickly solve it instead of trying to

hide behind, "oh, we haven't actually formally requested the two hours". I think everybody knows the game. Now I think the Liberals would be happy to see us filibuster through next Tuesday because they don't even need to be held accountable for their own budget.

Also, May 26 is quite an aggressive timeline under which you'd like to conclude clause-by-clause. Last year, we were short of witness testimony. This year, we'll likely be short of witness testimony. Again, we talk about majority will. The minister has been invited to this committee for 480 minutes over the last year and is intending to appear for 60 minutes next week.

In a weird way, I think the government is actually quite happy to let this continue, because they'll try to get a news article saying that we're preventing the minister from coming and that she's ready to come. Yet, they could easily solve this whole thing by saying, yes, it's going to be 60 minutes, it's great, we'll see you next Tuesday and Bob's your uncle. We all go home and we make it.

I'm wearing my flying pigs socks. I know that the parliamentary secretary is wearing his flying pig socks.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Adam Chambers: I had high hopes for today.

That's the tradition. Mr. Blaikie will leave when we suspend and will go and put on his socks and I think we'll have a resolution.

There are multiple paths to one outcome, and it seems relatively reasonable to at least confirm with the minister for how long she might be available, so I would like to ask the chair whether the minister has been asked how long she is available for.

The Chair: The committee asked that an invitation be sent out to the minister. The minister did respond and said that she was available. This was for the committee—including you, MP Chambers. The minister was available to come before committee on the 16th, next Tuesday.

Mr. Adam Chambers: That's excellent.

I have a follow-up question. Can we ask for how long? That doesn't require a motion. It doesn't require an invitation. That is a follow-up question in order for us to be prepared. How can the chair and the clerk be prepared if we don't know for how long the minister is available?

The Chair: We will suspend for a bit. Thank you.

• (1145) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1145)

The Chair: We're back.

I was talking to the clerk. He has great knowledge, our clerk.

Thank you, Alexandre—and Sacha—very much for all the help. You do a great job.

I guess we can ask. It's at the will of the committee. The committee can always ask.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Not to be too pedantic, but if we think about preparing for next Tuesday, we might have two hours of committee with the minister, if she's available, or an hour with the minister and potentially an hour with witnesses, so we actually have to know if we need to schedule witnesses or invite witnesses for Tuesday. I think it would be important to clarify with the minister for how long she is available.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Just on a quick point of order, would it be useful for us to clarify that we think that question should be submitted electronically and not by carrier pigeon to Japan? I just think if we clear up some of the details at the outset—

The Chair: That's up to the committee, MP Blaikie.

MP Chambers, go ahead.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do want to just briefly comment in response to Mr. Baker's intervention about delaying potential supports for Canadians, the GST rebate, which is being marketed as the “grocery rebate”—thanks to the NDP, as I'm sure I hear somewhere in the back of the room—and is not actually going out until July for the sole reason of the government's incapability of executing it properly.

They even split off a separate bill to pass what we're calling the “grocery rebate”—the HST rebate—but for those cheques, actually, that relief is not going out until early July. That's not because this committee is delayed. That's actually because the government's execution capabilities were such that even when we all agreed to pass it quickly we couldn't get it out.

There is no relief, not one penny of relief, that's going to be delayed because of what's happening here.

By the way, with Mr. Baker's amendment, this bill is going to be out of committee on May 26 anyway. There is no relief from this budget that's going to be delayed for or lost by Canadians because we've lost a few hours of committee testimony. They are programming it to be out by May 26 in any event.

I just have to take slight issue with that: It's in fact the government's own execution capabilities that have delayed relief getting to Canadians. In fact, all parties got together, supported and fast-tracked the bill that separated out the GST rebate. We supported it a couple of months ago, the Conservatives did, and as well in the fall when it came out. We did so on the understanding that it would more expeditiously get help to Canadians, but those cheques will not be going out until July.

In summary, Mr. Chair, I think it would be great if we get the confirmation. I believe that is under way. I think that will help us advance this impasse once we get an answer back from the minister's office. I think we're being a little cute when we say, yes, the minister can come, but we're not sure for how long. If we can confirm that, it would be great.

I will just point out that this is feeling a little like the twilight zone, because when the government provides answers like that, you have to ask yourself if maybe they want the filibuster to continue. They don't want to be accountable. We're actually pulling resources

from other committees, which gets the government off the hook for talking about some difficult and uncomfortable situations in other committees.

On this side of table, at least, we think there is a path to a solution without actually being too intrusive. I'd love to see witness testimony. I was very frustrated last year with the lack of witness testimony and when the only opportunity is for them to go to the Senate, which is a fine institution, no doubt, but members around this table have some very intelligent questions to ask of witnesses when they show up. I would like to get to that point, but I really hope that the government is not now hoping that the filibuster continues. I hope they will answer the question about how long the minister is available forthwith, so that we may proceed.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate your indulgence. I apologize for interrupting earlier on the point of order of Mr. Baker, which I understand was an appropriate notice of motion. I didn't think it was appropriate to move it at that point or to motivate it.

I hope we can proceed in such a fashion and that we'll get an answer back from the clerk. I'm sure that when the clerk receives an answer, he will interrupt us right away and let us know.

I thank both clerks for their work, as well as the interpreters.

I don't think anybody has really given too many accolades to our interpreters, but thank you to them for being with us.

I see a thumbs-up. We appreciate all the work you do.

Mr. Chair, I'll yield the floor.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chambers.

I have MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Did I hear “oh no”? I thought I was gaining friends. I'm sensitive that way.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am recalling, though, some discussion from Tuesday night about the question of whether this bill of the finance minister is or is not an omnibus bill. Maybe this is a question that we could pose as an important question for the minister, if the Minister of Finance comes for two hours.

There was some claim that it wasn't. I obviously believe that a finance bill is about the government raising money, expending money and borrowing money, and that things outside of that are actually bills related to other matters.

That's why we call them omnibus bills.

I know that all the members on the government side love this document, “A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class”, which is the 2015 platform they ran on. I’ll read from page 30 of what it says. It mentions one of the best prime ministers Canada has ever had, that being Stephen Harper, saying, “Stephen Harper has also used omnibus bills to prevent Parliament from properly reviewing and debating his proposals.” That was the perspective of the Liberal Party then, that this prevented Parliament from properly debating proposals. I know that most Canadians will be shocked to learn that the Liberal government said, “We will change the House of Commons Standing Orders to bring an end to this undemocratic practice.”

That’s probably why some of the government members objected to me calling this an omnibus bill, but as I pointed out, there are amendments to the Canada Elections Act in this bill. The Canada Elections Act is not a question of spending, borrowing or raising money, but apparently that is not considered an omnibus element under the promise of the Liberals in 2015 to end that practice.

I can understand that maybe that’s what is making the minister feel uncomfortable in coming. Perhaps I’m being generous, because I actually think it’s the content of the bill, not so much in the sense of the inability, or the ability, of her to actually defend in Parliament—in Parliament, where truthfulness is everything—why her document and why her economic statement said we would have a balanced budget only six months ago in Parliament. She said that to Parliament, tabled the document in Parliament, made it available to Canadians, and yet, at the end of the day, only six months later, she...or somebody within the government told her that’s no longer our plan: We’re going to go back to our plan that we’ve been following since we got into office. It’s not the one we promised in 2015, where we would only run small budget deficits and would balance the budget in 2019—no, no.

But that’s what was promised. The minister probably doesn’t like being reminded of that. Either she or the collectivity of the cabinet, or perhaps the Prime Minister’s Office, didn’t free Freeland to live up to that promise—or “Bill no more”, the previous guy—when they now say, well, we’re going to balance it again. They went back to their 2015 promise in 2022 and said, okay, well, on what we’ve been saying in the last six or seven years, where we weren’t going to balance the budget, we’ve now been convinced that we’re going to balance the budget. Now the budget that gets presented to Parliament proposes no balancing of the budget.

These are questions that need to be asked on behalf of Canadians. It’s not as if there is a revenue problem, because there’s 63% more revenue coming in to the Government of Canada today than there was when this government was elected in 2015. If you believe this plan...and remember that none of these budget plans have ever been met that the Liberals have put in. Much like the climate change plan, none of these budgets have ever been met. If you believe this plan, by the end of the five-year fiscal framework government revenue will have gone up 92%.

I’ve told a few stories in the last few hours before this committee to bring people back, but regardless of age, most people in this committee and most people watching are familiar with a group called The Beatles. I presume that most people are. I’m a fan. I’ve always been a fan. It’s one of my favourite groups. They had, if you recall 1971, billboard top hits—34 top tens and 20 number ones.

In that mix was a song called *Taxman*. Every time I hear it, I think of the current Prime Minister.

I won’t do justice to the way John Lennon sang it, although he did not write it, but it goes like this:

One, two, three, four
One, two
One, two, three, four

Let me tell you how it will be

This was about the Labour government of the 1960s in Britain. That’s what this song was written about.

There’s one for you, 19 for me

The “me” here is the government.

‘Cause I’m the taxman
Yeah, I’m the taxman

Should five percent appear too small

That’s the 5% you get to keep that you earned.

Be thankful I don’t take it all

‘Cause I’m the taxman
Yeah, I’m the taxman

If you drive a car, I’ll tax the street
If you try to sit, I’ll tax your seat
If you get too cold, I’ll tax the heat

That one has a special resonance right now. “I’ll tax the heat” could have been a carbon tax.

If you take a walk, I’ll tax your feet

Well, we know that the carbon tax impacts the cost of shoes, because it requires rubber, which requires oil and gas. Every stage of manufacturing a shoe has a carbon tax applied, which is increasing inflation.

If you drive a car, I’ll tax the street
If you try to sit, I’ll tax your seat
If you get too cold, I’ll tax the heat
If you take a walk, I’ll tax your feet

I think that’s the platform of the Liberal Party.

‘Cause I’m the taxman
Yeah, I’m the taxman

Don’t ask me what I want it for

The Chair: We have a point of order from MP Ste-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I wish to thank Mr. Perkins for all the information he is sharing, but I fear he misled the committee by insinuating that John Lennon sang that Beatles' song. I checked, and George Harrison was the one who sang the song. It was the first time he was asked to sing. We have to give the Fab Four their due, especially the great guitarist George Harrison, who was able to sing a ditty.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[English]

On that same point of order, go ahead, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On the same point of order, I think *Give Peace a Chance* might actually be a Beatles song with a more practical implication for the committee. Perhaps we should consider that song instead of others in this moment that we find ourselves in.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Once again, Mr. Chair, I want to make sure the committee is not being misled. Unless I'm mistaken, *Give Peace a Chance* is not a Beatles' song. It's by John Lennon, after he went solo. I should point out that during his bed-in at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal, he wanted to record the song, but the original recording was actually lost so the song had to be re-recorded somewhere else.

I think the committee should have the most accurate information possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

MP Perkins, I hope that helps.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I defer to the greatness of the Bloc member, who is clearly an even bigger fan than I am. I'm sure he then, with his knowledge, will know that *Taxman*, this famous song, was actually not written by Lennon or McCartney. It was written by Gary Harrison. Gary Harrison wrote the song.

Don't ask me what I want it for
If you don't want to pay some more

It's sort of a threat.

'Cause I'm the taxman
Yeah, I'm the taxman

Now my advice for those who—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Is that what you guys say about this filibuster—don't ask us what we want it for?

The Chair: MP Dzerowicz has her hand up.

MP Dzerowicz, is that to get on the speaking order or is it—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Yes.

The Chair: It's to get on the speaking order.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's if I could ever speak.

The Chair: MP Perkins, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I was hoping maybe MP Dzerowicz had some more insights on the Beatles for us.

The song concludes, “my advice for those who die/Declare the pennies on your eyes/'Cause I'm the taxman...And you're working for no one, but me.”

I know that's the way Canadians feel when they read this bill or hear what the minister wants to do, because it's clear that the carbon tax is not only a tax on the car and the street; it's a tax on your seat; it's a tax on the heat, and it's a tax on your feet, as the Beatles said. It almost sounds "Dr. Seuss-ish". Dr. Seuss would probably be appalled by the impact of this bill on the cost of the carbon tax on the production of pulp and paper for the printing of his books.

In the end, back to what MP Chambers said, this is not some sort of theoretical thing; it can all be solved by the minister agreeing—and I'm sure the PMO has told her, wherever she is travelling to, that the committee is asking for two hours. I'm sure they've informed her of that. There was some implication that she would not know until a motion was passed here. The parliamentary secretary Mr. Beech, I'm sure, in his many conversations with the minister, will have informed her about what's going on in the committee and what it would take to solve this, to address the issues, that Mr. Blaikie so rightly raises, that we want to hear about from Canadians.

It appears that the government doesn't want to hear from them, because we've been given notice of essentially a closure motion to try to keep Canadians from hearing about the budget, or to try to keep us from hearing from the minister. I know it's on notice, so we'll deal with that when it comes. We may have a few things to say about a closure motion and may perhaps quote the Liberals on their past practices and promises around closure.

If you'll recall, Mr. Chair, the document that was very insightful, which I'm sure all ministers have read, was this Treasury Board document called “Meeting the Expectations of Canadians: Review of the Responsibilities and Accountabilities of Ministers and Senior Officials”. For those who have not been watching or who have just joined us, I won't start from the beginning—because there are 55 pages, and I have about 30 or 40 pages left to read—but I will mention to you, just as a reminder, as a great summary, what this requires. It says in here that, “Parliament is sovereign”, and also states that “the House of Commons is a central feature of [our Westminster] system, and its efficacy depends heavily on the will and capacity of the House to hold ministers accountable.”

That's how our democracy works. That is why some may find this process frustrating, but that's all we're trying to do. Even the Treasury Board of Canada said that an essential and fundamental part of our democracy is for Parliament to be able to hold ministers to account. That's what we're talking about here. We're not talking about having her appear before the committee five or six times, even though she has been invited; we're asking her to give us one more hour. “Brother, can you spare a dime?” was sort of a saying in the dirty thirties and what happened in that global depression.

Finance Minister, can you spare us an hour or two, please?"

One more hour is not a lot to ask for on a \$3.1-trillion spending package. In fact, I think if I were putting forward a motion—and I might actually put forward a subamendment at some time—asking the minister to appear for as long as this discussion has gone on so that we could get to the root of all of these budgets, and so MP Blaikie could pose all the questions he wants to, because I'm sure the five-minute and two-and-a-half-minute spots he'll get in a one-hour thing would be totally inadequate for the NDP to ask the questions they want to ask the minister, and that's all the NDP would be allocated in a one-hour hearing with the minister on this budget.

I don't think the dental plan and the pharmacare plan that are part of the supply agreement with the Liberals could adequately be questioned as to, one, whether one is adequate, and, two, why the other one isn't in the budget. I don't think it could be done in that short a time.

By the way, for those of you who don't know parliamentary rules, the five minutes that MP Blaikie will get and that two and a half minutes on a subsequent round are not just for his questions. It's for the answers. The NDP will get a total of about seven and a half minutes to question the minister on a \$3.1-trillion spending bill and on why the things they have put in their supply agreement with the Liberals have not been addressed, presumably to their satisfaction. I'm presuming that.

If we stay for two hours—if she grants us another hour—all that does is double the amount of time Mr. Blaikie gets, roughly—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: No, not quite, because I don't get the first round again.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, you don't get the first round, so it's two-and-a-half-minute cycles.

If this chair...I don't know...if this chair is a very generous chair... The chair of the industry committee, Mr. Lightbound, is very open to how the flow of questions goes, and that might be a way to look at the two hours: to say, okay, I like the form of questioning here. Maybe, if Mr. Blaikie's questions are so insightful and the minister's answers are so penetrating and revealing, he might let him go for eight minutes in a session, as Mr. Lightbound does sometimes in that committee, but that's just—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Presuming she doesn't speak during the first question....

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, she could talk out the five minutes. That's the other option. If Mr. Blaikie is excessively polite, which I know he is, he might ask one question and the minister could fill up the five minutes, unless he does as MP Erskine-Smith does quite artfully and did brilliantly against the CEOs of the telecom companies in saying: "That's not my question. You're not answering my question. Please focus on my question."

At the end, of course, after dealing for two hours with the CEOs, much like the experience we have with government ministers, I found it interesting that MP Erskine-Smith condemned the three CEOs for not answering questions and for going from talking points. Talking points...that's something that apparently happens quite a bit, as we see in the House.

You'll know that I'm not using any talking points here, but I am using some very important documents that are put out by the government to explain the minister's role in being accountable to Parliament.

On page 16 of the Treasury Board document that I've shared... That's to help the translators, folks, just so they can follow along. I am conscious of my pacing, because I know that if you speak too fast it makes it hard for the translators to follow. Also, I know the members on the government side don't want me to slow it down too much for the agony of perhaps prolonging it, from their perspective, but I will take the occasion, just in case I haven't articulated well, to spell some of the words here, particularly those words "ministerial accountability" and feel groovy. Slow down and feel groovy. That's another great line from a Beatles song. I think everyone is blessed that I didn't quote any songs from The Monkees.

On page 16, we were talking about something called the main estimates and the minister's accountability for main estimates. They contain the spending proposals.

This Treasury Board document says:

In the Main Estimates, the government presents Parliament with spending proposals for a fiscal year and provides details on individual programs and on the plans and performance of departments and agencies. It indicates the areas in which it will spend funds and defines the limits to what the government may legally spend on a program without returning to Parliament to request more funds—

That is critical to do. We will recall that at the beginning of COVID this government wanted to actually not have to go back to Parliament for two years, to just have blanket authority to spend whatever they wanted, something that you find quite frequently in the supposed legislature dominated by the Communist Party of China in Beijing.

—which is done through a supply bill or an appropriations act. If called, ministers must appear before a committee of the House of Commons to answer questions....

It doesn't say "may appear" or maybe "at will, if they're not out travelling the world". I don't know why the Minister of Finance would be attending NATO meetings, but apparently she's been spending a lot of time there. It doesn't have "will". This committee invited, very politely, the minister to appear on estimates this year. She ignored the Treasury Board guidelines for ministerial responsibility and did not come. It says right here in this Government of Canada Treasury Board guidelines that the minister will appear on estimates.

The final sentence is even more direct. If you didn't get to that sentence, the final sentence of this paragraph is "If called, ministers must appear before a committee of the House of Commons to answer questions on spending"—that's a "must". Why is it this minister doesn't feel that she must appear for two hours—two hours—on this bill?

It goes on about several other committees and their roles, such as the Standing Committee on Government Operations. In the interest of brevity, I will skip that paragraph. Actually, I'll skip the next one too, because it is about the public accounts committee. We're in the finance committee here. I know everyone is impressed with my brevity.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: There is a public accounts meeting later on.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Oh, there is a public accounts meeting later today, so it's being requested that we actually hear just a little more, for the usage of those who have dual committee responsibilities, what the Treasury Board says the roles of ministers are with respect to the public accounts committee.

It has in the final paragraph on page 16, "The Standing Committee on Public Accounts"—otherwise more colloquially known as the public accounts committee—"scrutinizes all reports of the auditor general and The Public Accounts of Canada once they are tabled in the House of Commons."

If viewers want to see what the agenda is for those committees or for this committee, they can go to Ourcommons.ca and click under "Committees", pick out the committee they're interested in and see the agenda. If, for some reason, this committee's not being broadcast on CPAC, those who are watching this will know already, I guess, that they can go to ParlVU. They can watch anything that's going on online in Parliament. They just click on the committee. They can actually go back and view past things. They could go back and start to watch from the beginning, if they wanted to, my presentation on ministerial accountability and these important government documents.

It's being pointed out that these are in both official languages, because I do respect immensely my Bloc colleagues and want to make sure people know that they can get any of these presentations or minutes and can watch or view in both official languages. It's easy. There's a button to click at the bottom. You just choose between English and French. That's very important, because we are an officially bilingual country.

We only have one officially bilingual province, though: New Brunswick. Canadians have a right to ask for government services in the language of their choice.

This final paragraph continues about the public accounts committee, "The Committee helps ensure that public funds are spent for the purposes authorized by Parliament." It doesn't say that the committee helps understand or oversee the monies spent by the Minister of Finance on her own, without anybody watching over her shoulder, except for, maybe, the chief of staff of the Prime Minister. It doesn't say that here in this Treasury Board document.

What it has is, "The Committee helps ensure that public funds are spent for the purposes authorized by Parliament." Only Parliament can authorize spending, right? This is part of this process, this massive omnibus bill amending 51 acts. It's important, to get to an understanding of that act that we be able to ask the key questions, and we need to ask them to the minister responsible. It's a fairly basic thing.

It actually goes back to the basic establishment of the mother of all parliaments in Great Britain. For those of you who don't know, the reason the House of Commons is green is that the first House of Commons in Britain was held in a farmer's field. It wasn't held in the winter, so the grass was green. That's why that's our colour—to represent the commoners, the farmers, agriculture, the roots of our country, the common people, because the common people have common sense. That's what we should be following to bring it home.

The Treasury Board report continues to say that the public accounts committee does not assess the appropriateness of policies adopted by the government. It's actually for committees like this to examine the appropriateness of those issues. Public accounts' job is to ensure that the money that was allocated to change the symbol on the king's crown from a religious symbol to a snowflake—because apparently Canada is the only country with snow—has been spent correctly, and that it hasn't been spent on enforcement of rules regarding elvers—although, Lord knows, we need that since the RCMP is refusing to enforce the law in Nova Scotia around illegal poaching. Maybe some of that money could be diverted there—but, no, the public accounts would find that a misuse of public funds, because that is not what Parliament will be approving. If Parliament approves this bill, it will approve those specific changes.

It's funny though. Even though this bill deals with symbols around royalty, I was shocked to learn that the bill doesn't deal with the images on Canada's passport. The government decided on its own that we should remove the image of Terry Fox and replace it with a squirrel eating a nut. Apparently a squirrel eating a nut is more Canadian than Terry Fox.

That would be an interesting question to pose to the minister. Maybe the minister is thinking that she has to squirrel it away for a rainy day. I don't see any squirrelling away for a rainy day in this budget with \$130 billion of debt projected to be added to our national debt, bringing it to almost \$1.4 trillion, by the way, of which \$1.1 trillion will have been added by the two Trudeaus. For those who don't know it, the current Prime Minister's father was also prime minister for a number of years and left our country in—oh, I've been asked which years, because we have some young people in the room.

Specifically, he was first elected in 1968 and then defeated—which was a glorious day—on February 23, 1979, if I am correct, but I will defer to my Beatles expert, who may know more specifically.

Unfortunately, nine months later, that government of the Right Honourable Joe Clark.... By the way, for those who don't know it, after Pierre Trudeau was defeated, he resigned as leader. He drove away from Parliament Hill in his rare Mercedes Gullwing car because he didn't have the limo anymore. That car, which the son now owns, is worth something around \$30 million or \$40 million. The car is actually worth more than the \$14 million that apparently the Prime Minister is worth. The car is actually worth more than his other assets. That doesn't seem right, but he inherited a beautiful car, and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau left town with his tail between his legs in a very expensive, collectible and rare car.

In early 1980 a very colourful finance minister, who later in the Mulroney government went on to serve as justice minister and trade minister, someone by the name of John Crosbie, who was Joe Clark's finance minister in 1979, presented a budget, accountable to Parliament. That budget proposed the outrageous idea that in order the help pay off the debt and deficits that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau had built up—which was the reason he lost his finance minister, by the way, in 1975 when John Turner resigned over that—there would be a tax on gasoline of 18¢ a gallon. We hadn't converted to metric yet, but that would be 4.5¢ a litre. For those who don't know what a Canadian gallon is, it's not a U.S. gallon. They would have been pikers compared to this government and the carbon tax, which, before the end of the decade, is going to add 41¢ a litre to the cost of gas. Unfortunately we lost John Crosbie a couple of years ago, but John would blush at the thought of presenting a budget that imposed 41¢ per litre of tax because the result of John Crosbie's tax of 18¢ a gallon or 4.5¢ a litre was that the Liberals and the NDP got together, I believe with the Union Nationale from Quebec, to defeat the Crosbie budget and send us to an election.

You would think that, at the time since the Liberals didn't have a leader, they wouldn't have done such a thing and would have respected the fact that somebody was trying to clean up the mess they had caused, but apparently not, so the wily old Allan MacEachen from Nova Scotia got Pierre Trudeau back into the saddle to fight the 1980 election, where he ran around calling himself “The Gunslinger”. Can you imagine that? A Liberal Prime Minister called himself the gunslinger. Given what the Liberals are doing with Bill C-21, I find it hard to believe that they would be proud of the legacy of a Liberal prime minister who served ultimately from 1968 to 1979 and then from 1980 to 1984 called himself the gunslinger.

He would actually stand with his fingers pointed like guns in his belt loop when he was campaigning. The gunslinger. I guess he had a different view on firearms from the one the current government has.

If I could go on to the next sentence of the report, it's the last sentence on page 16—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm being reminded we have many knowledgeable members of Parliament here who are very familiar with history. MP Maguire, who has an extensive background in elected office, understands and remembers those times, as well, and remembers that, not unlike his promises in 1974, Pierre Trudeau said he wouldn't oppose wage and price controls and made fun of the Tory leader Robert Stanfield by saying, “Zap, you're frozen.”.

When he then got into government, unusually for a Liberal, he flipped his position and brought in wage and price controls.

He said he would not impose an 18¢-a-gallon tax or 4.5¢-a-litre tax on Canadians on gas. He said it was outrageous.

When he was brought back.... It was without a leadership convention, by the way.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Really.

Mr. Rick Perkins: They just put him in and appointed him. It's not very democratic. What did he do when he got re-elected and defeated the government of Joe Clark? He brought in the tax that he ran against.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Really.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I know it's unusual and people will find it hard to believe that they—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: What about the GST? Didn't they do that again?

Mr. Rick Perkins: No—

The Chair: MP Perkins, I think I mentioned—for the sake of the interpreters, for their health and safety, and for members—the crosstalk that's coming across affects the interpreters.

First, it doesn't allow them to do their job professionally, and it affects them because they're not able to do the interpretation. They're getting bad sound, so could we allow just one speaker at a time?

I have MP Ste-Marie on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you for that important reminder, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to clarify something. The honourable member wasn't sure about the name of the party in Quebec. I think he meant to say the Social Credit Party, which was led by Réal Caouette for many years. I don't think he meant the Union nationale, a party in the National Assembly, in Quebec City, led by the “*Cheuf*”, Maurice Duplessis.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

Go ahead, MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you very much.

That was yet another insightful historical intervention, not on the Beatles, but one the correct name of the party that was in Parliament at the time. I very much appreciate that. Nonetheless, the result of their joining the vote to defeat the government resulted in Canadians actually having to pay the tax anyway and a Liberal Party surprisingly promising one thing in an election and doing another. That's the one thing I know Canadians depend on. It's like saying we're going to balance the budget and not, and then saying in 2022 we're going to balance the budget and then six months later we're not.

There are many other things I could talk about that happened between 1980 and 1984. We could talk about the fact that between 1980 and 1984, once Pierre Trudeau was back in, we didn't have a goods and services tax in Canada. We had something called the manufacturers' sales tax. I'm sure everyone here is familiar with the manufacturers' sales tax, especially the young people in the room. But if you're not familiar with it, there was no tax on sales like you see now on your bill. Back then what we had was a tax only on things that were manufactured, but it wasn't once the thing had been manufactured; It was a tax on every level of the process of manufacturing. Between 1980 and 1984 that tax rose 7% to 14% on all manufactured goods.

If you were manufacturing something and you bought a piece of wood to manufacture it, you paid a 14% tax on it. Then if you bought a saw to cut it, you paid a 14% tax on that. Then if you cut that into something that then got made and sold to another company for that company to turn it into part of, say, furniture, it got taxed again. All through the system it got taxed 14%. It wasn't visible. Nobody knew it existed except for Parliament and people in Parliament. That government almost doubled the hidden tax in four years.

Yes, it's true, and that tax continued to exist from 1984 to 1988 during the first term of the Mulroney government, although his government signalled in an economic blueprint released in 1985 that they were going to restructure the economy and look at trade rules around the world. There was no free trade anywhere in the world. There was not even a WTO. There were some rounds of GATT, but there wasn't much going on in free trade. There were 10 or 12 tax brackets back then. They had to look at that. There were issues with the inefficiencies of the sales tax as we were moving from the manufacturing economy to a services economy. That's why in the 1988 campaign the Conservative government said, "You know what? We're going to get rid of the 14% manufacturers' sales tax". That was the election on free trade, a unique concept in the world at the time. They said they were going to get rid of the 14% manufacturers' sales tax and cut it in half down to 7%, and make it fair across the whole economy so that manufacturing wouldn't be unduly penalized versus the services industry, because we have a competitive economy. The tax actually got reduced, but the most important thing that was done was that, unlike the Liberal manufacturers' sales tax, the goods and services tax was made visible.

Believe it or not, I as a young fellow with a lot of hair would sit in as a staffer at some of those cabinet meetings. In the way staff sit behind us here today, I would sit in on some of those cabinet meetings where they discussed whether or not it should be made visible. It was a big political debate because, politically, why would you remind people every time they bought something that you had imposed this tax? That was the beauty from a political perspective of increasing the manufacturers' sales tax, because you could increase it and nobody would know, no consumer would know it because was just buried in the price. But if you made the goods and services tax visible, then you would be accountable to the people who elected you if you decided to increase it or decrease it.

A good public policy choice was made after an extensive debate to say that we're going to do the right thing, because even though perhaps the current government doesn't realize they won't be in power forever, we realized that unfortunately we wouldn't be in

power forever, and we weren't. If future governments wanted to change the goods and services tax, doing so would have to be visible to Canadians. They would have to be held accountable, like this committee tries to do, to Canadians for changing one of the most fundamental things of a democracy, taxation. Whether the Crown did it before we had a Westminster system, or whether you had the American Revolution over taxation and the Boston Tea Party, taxation is a fundamental thing, particularly when you want to have taxation without representation. Indeed, you can't have representation if you don't know the tax exists.

The GST was made public and visible and it was not a good thing for the Mulroney government for its reputation with people. All of a sudden people thought, "What's this? Why are we getting a new tax?" It wasn't a new tax; it was a replacement tax at half the other rate, but they thought they had a new tax.

The government paid a political price for that, amongst other things. Trying to bring Quebec into the constitutional family, through the Meech Lake accord and the Charlottetown accord, also had an impact among the public. Doing "big things", as the Prime Minister's mandate letter asks ministers—to do the "big things"—was what that was about. It was trying to make sure Quebec was part of our Canadian family along with "big things" like doing the right thing and making sure future governments would be held accountable for any changes in the sales tax that we would collect as a government or would be responsible for as a government.

Do you know what? It worked. It has been a financial bonanza, far beyond the thoughts of what our humble minds could envisage at the time we brought it in, in terms of the amount of revenue, because as the economy grows, the revenue to the government grows because people spend more.

On top of that, guess what. Nobody has increased the tax. That visibility has kept at bay what was happening before. In fact, some may recall that one of the greatest prime ministers we ever had, Stephen Harper, actually reduced the tax by 2% from 7% to 5%. What happened afterwards was puzzling because this goes to the whole issue of accountability and visibility. For efficiency, many of the provinces, over the years, have managed to combine their provincial sales tax with the federal sales tax in something called the HST, or the harmonized sales tax. The harmonized sales tax was for administrative efficiency. It also allowed provincial governments to expand the number of goods and services that their provincial sales taxes were on, because the GST was the broader one, so it increased revenue.

What a number of provinces did, except for Alberta.... In most provinces, the combined provincial and federal sales tax, between the GST and the provincial tax, when harmonized, was 14% to 15%, except in Alberta where they have no provincial sales tax. Alberta is the only province today that has seen the benefit, in a long term, of Stephen Harper's reduction from 7% to 5% of the GST.

In my home province, when the NDP were in power, that's what happened. The one term and only term NDP government under Darrell Dexter, who I consider a friend, decided to take up the room and to increase the provincial sales tax from 8% to 10% keeping the HST at 15%. Nobody in Nova Scotia got to see the benefit of that reduction in tax. I think, if I stand corrected, a lot of other provinces thought that was a great idea, because we could hide our tax increase and not get the blame for it.

Again, it goes to the issue of this subamendment to the main amendment about accountability of ministers. If you don't know the tax is increasing, it's pretty hard to hold them to account. That's why the final sentence of this page, on page 16, says, "It is concerned solely"—that is the public accounts committee—"with the economy and efficiency of government administration, and it tables reports"—the public accounts committee—that "are *answerable* to Parliament". In the same sense...oh, I'm sorry. I went back to page 15 from 16. It's almost like I was a Liberal. I counted backwards.

I'll read that sentence again. "It is concerned", the public accounts, "solely with the economy and efficiency of government administration, and it tables reports on ways to improve managerial and financial practices and controls in departments. A member of the official opposition chairs this committee."

This is to MP Lawrence's question earlier just to make sure that we understand the role of public accounts versus the role of the finance committee. Public accounts oversees and makes sure that, where the government says in its estimates that it will spend the money, it only gets spent there. Unlike the habit of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I just have a quick point of order here.

The Chair: A point of order, Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm reminded by my colleagues across the way that we have to be relevant. I would point the member perhaps to the \$12 billion of unaccounted funds in the budget as a way of connecting to relevance here.

The Chair: MP Perkins, your fellow colleague is telling you to be relevant. Let's refocus.

The amendment says "That the Minister of Finance be invited to appear for two hours on the bill and that this appearance be scheduled on or before May 18th, 2023."

MP Perkins.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I have a point of order before we continue, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Point of order, MP Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much.

I just wonder if the clerk has heard back from the minister's office yet.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rick Perkins: There's no new update.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was hoping that the Prime Minister's Office was watching on ParlVu and monitoring this and saying that MP Perkins is making great points. What have we done? We really need to tell the minister to come to the committee for two hours.

Ms. Sophie Chatel: And the Pope too....

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's being suggested that we should call the Pope. I'm not sure he's in good enough health to do that right now, but maybe the committee could travel to Rome, to the Vatican to have questions. I know we have a travel deadline request coming up for standing committees. Maybe it's something the government would like to propose.

The practices of the House of Commons to pay for the translators...2017....

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Chair.

The Chair: MP Maguire, welcome to the committee.

Is this a point of order?

Mr. Larry Maguire: It's a point of relevance. Yes, it's going back to what my colleague was saying about the government. They implemented the GST. They said they wouldn't do some things, but ended up doing so with the gas tax when they came in. It's the same relevance that happened to the Manitoba NDP when Premier Selinger, in an election campaign, said he wouldn't raise the PST in Manitoba.

An hon. member: What's the PST?

Mr. Larry Maguire: It's the provincial sales tax. I'm corrected by my colleague there. These acronyms sometimes aren't always picked up by everyone, so I appreciate his intervention.

Of course, within months of re-forming government they did. It was 1%. It went back up, but there were even discussions of 2% at that time. I guess they didn't figure that they could push it that far, but they still lost the next election over it. I remind my Liberal colleagues that there are good things that can happen when you don't pay attention to what happens to the finances of the country, which is relevant to the budget that we're speaking on there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Maguire.

MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, MP Maguire, for that clarification on the use of a province on the provincial sales tax.

I want to say that on page 17, we come to an interesting point in the report or the requirements on ministerial accountability from Treasury Board.

It may come to a shock to committee members that I occasionally tell stories about the experiences I've had in the past, sitting around cabinet tables and that kind of thing as a staffer, and some of the history we've gone over. Sometimes I joke that I sat in the cabinet of Sir John A., but I will clarify here for the public record that I did not.

I am going to make a reference here that really matters. It is in this document. I wanted to make that clarification before somebody makes a point of order against me, asking me if I was here in the presence of what this document says. I will say that I was not there for what I'm about to read. It says:

The practices of the House of Commons and the use of standing committees have evolved. The practices and procedures that the House adopted in 1867

—I'm making that clarification. I was not there then—

were a refinement of those in force in the United Province of Canada (1840–1867).

It's important for this point, I think, that the Treasury Board made a footnote on that point. In says in footnote 15 at the bottom of the page, "See a brief history of the evolution of the House of Commons in the McGrath Committee Report". Most people would pronounce it "McGrath", but it's not pronounced "McGrath". It's "McGraw". He was a good Newfoundlander MP who did an amazing report. It's still relevant today, if you haven't read it.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: There was an NDP member on that committee.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, there was, and his name was Blaikie. He contributed enormously to that seminal report on our parliamentary system. It should be mandatory reading for all today.

In case you don't know about the McGrath report, this footnote notes that it's called the "Report of the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons." It was by Queen's printer, the Government of Canada printer, and it was printed in 1985.

You may also want to see.... I'm sure MP Bill Blaikie, a fine gentleman whom I knew—the father of MP Blaikie sitting at this table here today—was part of it as well.

It says, "See also C. E. S. Franks." C.E.S. Franks did a report called "The Parliament of Canada". It was printed in Toronto by the University of Toronto Press two years later in 1987. If you go and get that report from the Library of Parliament, and I recommend you do, it says that, in particular, you should you look at pages 238-256.

Getting back to the paragraph on this issue of the united provinces of Canada and how committees have evolved:

Little changed in the standing orders—

The Standing Orders, by the way, for those watching, are the rules of the House and the rules of how all of this works.

—or in the detailed scrutiny of government expenditures until the mid-1950s.

I'll also clarify that I wasn't born then either, so please do not accuse me of sitting in cabinet meetings in the 1950s. It continues:

Rules adopted at that time addressed matters including the length of time for the budget debate.

That's an interesting point. Moreover:

In 1958, with the election of the Diefenbaker government—

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Were you there?

Mr. Rick Perkins: For the Diefenbaker government, I was not there. I never met John Diefenbaker, but I knew his executive assistant. MP Maguire met John Diefenbaker.

He was first elected prime minister in 1957 in a minority, but he had an overwhelming, smashing victory in 1958, winning many seats. He was only to be surpassed in the number of seats by Brian Mulroney's victory in 1984.

Apparently, in 1958, with the election of the Diefenbaker government:

...greater use was made of standing committees; for the first time, a member of the official opposition was chosen to chair the Public Accounts Committee—

Imagine that. The Conservative government of John Diefenbaker expanded the roles of committees and said examining the spending of government accounts by the public accounts committee is not something that should be chaired by a government member. They, in government, said, "We should have an opposition member chair the public accounts committee."

Is that a dedication to ministerial accountability? That's a belief in our parliamentary system like we don't see these days.

Again, I will read it, "for the first time, a member of the official opposition was chosen to chair the Public Accounts committee and the Committee began to hold regular meetings". That's a good concept.

In 1968 there were more significant reforms made to House procedures, including the following—and remember, I don't know what time of the year it was in 1968 that it happened. It could have been under Prime Minister Pearson, or it could have been under newly elected Prime Minister Trudeau, who was fresh faced, and there was Trudeaumania. If it was under him, with all the world before him to change the world and use government for good with an unusual respect for Parliament for the Liberals, in 1968 they made a series of significant reforms to House procedures, including the following three key changes.

The estimates were no longer considered by a committee of the whole of the House but were sent to standing committees. That was a good reform. It gave those expert committees the ability to scrutinize the spending of the departments that the minister is responsible for, i.e. the Fisheries minister in the fisheries committee or the Industry minister in the industry committee.

The second significant reform, according to Treasury Board, that was made in 1968 was that the opposition was given a total of 25 days when it could choose a topic of a debate. Those are colloquially called opposition days, when we get to propose a motion for the House to debate and move and, for the general part in this government, for the government to ignore the vote or, in some cases, vote against it, as they did recently on several opposition days. We were thankful that they voted to send China interference, which the government has been aware of for two years, I believe, yesterday, to the procedure and House committee. Thanks to some of these reforms, those things can happen.

The third thing was that most bills were referred to standing committees. I was talking with MP Blaikie the other day about bills going to standing committees, and talking about the time.... Again I'm going to give a story. There is a standing order that is still on the books today, little used, that committees could be freed up from the arduous work of dealing with legislation, which can throw off the important subject studies that standing committees do. For example, we now have three government bills before the industry committee, which has stopped, halted, right in the middle of the important study we were doing on a Bloc motion to have the electronics and recycling ecosystem studied by the industry committee to understand all types of things. That has been stopped because we now have three bills, Bill C-27 on privacy, Bill C-34, changes to the Investment Canada Act, which I'm sure all members here are very interested in, and Bill C-42, a bill to create, finally, a beneficial corporate ownership registry.

There is a standing order that still exists today that says you can refer bills to legislative committees. These are special committees that get set up for each bill. They exist for a bill, then disappear.

During the days when I was a young legislative assistant to a minister, that's where all bills went. They didn't go to standing committees, except for the budget. They didn't go to standing committees; they went to specially constituted legislative committees that would be set up, for example, to deal with Bill C-21, which changed the Firearms Act. It wouldn't go to security, SECU, as we call it. It would go to a special committee of MPs set up from all parties, and it would have its own budgets, its own clerks and its own travel budgets and then, when the bill was reported back to the House with or without amendments, that legislative committee would disappear.

For example, Mr. Chair, look at the biography of a former chair of this committee whom I knew well, Don Blenkarn, an irascible fellow from Mississauga who was elected and chaired this committee, I believe, for six years during the Mulroney government. He wasn't always a person who followed the government rules, I can tell you, much to the chagrin of then finance minister, Michael Wilson. When you look up his bio, you will see legislative committee after legislative committee after legislative committee listed by bill, because when a finance bill came out of second reading in the

House, the legislative committee would set up, and Don Blenkarn would always be one who wanted to be on those bills to examine them.

While this reform in 1968 referred it to standing committees, I know personally that there were further reforms to the Standing Orders to allow for more flexibility. It is something we should use a little more today, those legislative committees, but, like I've said before, I've gone a little off topic from this, but I still think it's about how we hold ministers to account in Parliament.

There are different ways to do it under the Standing Orders, and some are effective, but the key part of it, whether it's a standing committee, a legislative committee, public accounts, the finance committee or two of my favourites, industry and fisheries, is that ministers come because it's a courtesy on both sides.

It's a courtesy to ask the minister to come and explain why this is such a great legislative initiative, but it's also generally polite—like when you get a dinner invitation to somebody's house—to go. I won't say to you, Mr. Chair, since I expect I will get an invitation to dinner with you sometime, “Well, I can only go for half an hour.” I know you want to talk to me about the insights I've provided the committee on ministerial accountability for more than that over dinner and maybe a few glasses of wine.

An hon. member: What about eels?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I might bring eels with me. We could go for sushi.

An hon. member: They would be legal.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Legal...that's true. MP MacDonald reminds me, a fellow Atlantic Canadian, that a legal fishery is critical. I will only consume fish legally caught—shellfish, as well—as I'm sure you do, Mr. Chair. That is part of your respect for the law.

The report goes on to say, on page 17, “Further reforms occurred in 1982”—

I was getting ahead of myself, but 1982 was the last government of Pierre Trudeau and the year the Liberal government of the day brought in the national energy program. Now, the author of that recently died and there was a minute of silence for him in the House. I was surprised to see.... I think it was gracious of the western members to stand, out of respect for a former parliamentarian who had passed away, in a moment of silence. He was the minister of national energy in 1982 and implemented the national energy program, which essentially tried to nationalize oil and gas in western Canada and forever cut any chance of Liberals winning seats in the Prairies, in any significant way....out of their prospects. It's still much remembered today. I think it was the height of respect, accountability and graciousness for our western members to stand for a former parliamentarian, even though his primary claim to achievement in Parliament was a socialist program to nationalize our oil and gas, which resulted in the former premier, at that time.... He is also not with us anymore. He quipped, at one time, "Let the eastern...freeze." There's a little blank in there. I won't say the word out of respect for the institution. "Let the...freeze" if they're going to do this.

While on a tour of the Prairies, at that time, when the government was also—in 1982-83—trying to get rid of something called the "Crow rate".... No, I'm not talking about birdwatching. I'm talking about.... Back then, the rail company CN was a Crown corporation. It was how they charged for freight and grain on the Prairies. The fee they would charge was by the mile, back then. We might have gone to metric by then, which Prime Minister Trudeau brought in, but they charged it as the crow flies, not actually the miles or kilometres the train travelled. That, obviously, was cheaper than paying for the kilometres.

Of course, CN was a Crown corporation and, surprisingly, the government wanted more money from grain producers and, to try this, brought a bill to Parliament—on its own, not in an omnibus bill. It wasn't in an omnibus bill. They brought in a separate bill to get rid of the Crow rate. It was pretty controversial, as we know, because at one point in the heated debate in the House it was so bad—what we see in question period today is tame—that the opposition physically charged the chair in challenging her, and surrounded the Speaker, because the Speaker made a ruling that the opposition didn't agree with.

Back then, the rules were different, as this paper on accountability is telling us. One of the ways in which the opposition could hold the government to account was to not show up for the vote, because it required both whips to be present for a vote to be held. Because this was such a contentious issue, and because the Conservative Party didn't feel—we didn't feel—that the government was being held to account properly on it, the opposition whip didn't show up for the vote. Her Majesty's loyal Opposition didn't show up for the vote. The bells—occasionally we see them flashing in here, but as we know, they make a noise when you're not in the committee room—rang for 18 days straight. For 18 days straight, the House didn't sit because the official opposition whip would not show up until the government would compromise and bend on their desire to overcharge and to change the way grain farmers were being treated in this country.

I know that the analysts and the clerks of the committees could appreciate this: It got so bad and those bells were ringing for so long—they were physical bells, not electronic bells like we have now—that they wore out. They were having to replace bells in Centre Block in order to keep them running. They had to order new bells, place them and then hook them up to the wires so that the bells could keep ringing for 18 days. After 18 days, the government finally compromised a bit on that issue. That's about accountability. The opposition has few ways to be accountable.

I haven't read ahead, so I don't know if this paper deals with it—I apologize if it does—but the government changed the Standing Orders after that, by the way, so that the whips don't have to be present in the same way for a vote to happen. These things tend to change the rules, as this government has done by still using the COVID excuse to put in a bill with the costly coalition or the temporary Standing Order rules change that the government can extend the sitting into the evening to midnight anytime it wants, without the consent of Parliament.

Most incredibly, the NDP actually agreed. Great parliamentarians like Stanley Knowles would be rolling over in the grave.

Stanley Knowles, by the way, if you don't know of him, was House leader for the NDP for I think almost 30 years, MP Blaikie.

He was actually offered the Speaker's job by the prime minister I mentioned earlier—Mr. Diefenbaker—and said that, no, he didn't want it; there was an appointed Speaker back then. He said that he didn't want the job. He wanted to remain House leader.

Out of respect for Stanley Knowles, when Pierre Trudeau left office in 1984 he made Stanley Knowles an honorary clerk of the House. He gave him a seat at the procedures table and an office on the Hill. Nobody expected that he would actually go because he was retiring, but he went every day, I can tell you, as a young legislative.... Stanley Knowles sat at the table of the House every day for question period. He wasn't even elected anymore and he was going to question period, but the finance minister isn't. Stanley Knowles had more respect. As we search for Freeland, our "finding Freeland" exercise continues.

I wish Stanley Knowles were here today to tell us what he would think of a Minister of Finance not being willing to appear before committee for two hours and a Minister of Finance only being in question period for six hours to be held accountable.

The other thing that Liberal motion did on the Standing Orders is that it allows them to actually operate those evening sittings without a Liberal quorum, without government quorum. That's a fundamental thing about any meeting. Maybe some of our viewers—I hope they do—volunteer for organizations. If you go to the board meeting for those organizations, you need a quorum to conduct a meeting. The House of Commons is no different. You should have quorum to be able to conduct business, but they've temporarily suspended that democratic accountability element of the House of Commons until June.

I suspect that they're going to try to make it a permanent thing that they don't even have to show up. What do we expect? We can't get the Minister of Finance to come for two hours. Why wouldn't they amend the rules to ensure that the government doesn't actually have to show up when it forces the House to sit to midnight? Why would they bother showing up? They'll say, "We'll just make everyone else sit while we go and watch the Leafs win this round of the playoffs." It will happen: I am confident that the Leafs will win this round and make it to the next round. I know the chair of the committee agrees with me at least on our love of Canadian teams making it to the next round of the NHL playoffs. Edmonton also looks like it's on its way to the next round. I bet Edmonton will be in the final.

This paragraph says, "Further reforms occurred in 1982, including the establishment of an annual parliamentary calendar"—which you can find online, by the way—"and numerous measures to improve the use of the House's time."

In 1985, the McGrath report, of which MP Blaikie's father was a part of, noted that many parliamentarians were straining under the new workload placed upon them under this new committee system.

The Mulroney government, with one of our best prime ministers in my personal view, implemented a number of the McGrath committee report recommendations, as any good and responsive government would do that believes in ministerial accountability and democracy. The Mulroney government implemented a number of recommendations made by the McGrath committee report, as MP Blaikie knows, because I'm sure he had these discussions with his father. These included reducing the size of parliamentary committees and ensuring continuity of committee membership in order to allow them to develop expertise, and providing committees with their own budgets.

I know some of the staff here will really appreciate this one. The McGrath committee report asked that committees have research staff, and the Mulroney government agreed and implemented that recommendation.

I'll say that again. It recommended ensuring the continuity of committee membership and providing committees with their own budgets for research staff. Committees didn't have research staff before then. Legal counsel was provided, as well. Of course, when you're dealing with law, it's sometimes good to have legal counsel. The government also agreed that standing committees should have before them the full departmental policy array, including the department's objectives, the activities carried out in pursuit of those objectives and the immediate and long-term expenditure plans for achieving them.

Since 1993, further efforts have been made to enhance Parliament's capacity to hold the government to account by providing more timely and comprehensive information to Parliament, with greater focus on results, if you can believe it.

The government's operations and estimates committee was greater in 2002. I believe it would have still been the Chrétien government, when Prime Minister Chrétien was still in power, before the internal coup that happened in the Liberal Party where he was thrown out as a sitting prime minister and replaced by his finance minister, the ever ambitious "Mr. Dithers", Paul Martin.

This report by Treasury Board goes on. On page 18, for the sake of interpreters, it comes to a new section on the role of the Auditor General. We know the Auditor General is critical in the ministerial accountability framework in our parliamentary system. Under this report, which I'm sure all ministers have read, ministers need to understand the role of the Auditor General in their ministerial responsibilities.

I did not know that the first Auditor General was John Langton, but he had responsibilities to both the government and Parliament as deputy minister of finance and secretary of the Treasury Board. Let me get this right: The first Auditor General was actually the deputy minister of finance and Treasury Board. He was also responsible for the use of funds and for reporting to Parliament as a result of his audits. Gee, this guy was a super bureaucrat in the first Trudeau era, as it was famously called then in a book called "The Superbureaucrats". He was a super bureaucrat, auditor general, deputy minister of finance, secretary of the Treasury Board, and responsible to Parliament. That guy had a lot of meetings to go to in Parliament, and a lot of meetings to go to in the House.

It sort of reminds me—and I did not know this—that Sir John A. Macdonald's law partner was a guy named Sir Alexander Campbell from Kingston. They were law partners. He was also Sir John A. Macdonald's campaign manager. He did such a good job getting Sir John A. elected in Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Terry Beech: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order, PS Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: You're on a real roll. You are on page 17.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm on 18.

Mr. Terry Beech: We have moved to page 18.

I've done some math, Mr. Chair, and I think we might need to ask the clerk a question.

That is 55 pages?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Let me make sure I'm not including the bullet notes and the authors. I could read the authors too, but it's 51.

Mr. Terry Beech: It's 51, so it would be slightly less. We're about 22% through, so at your current pace you're going to need maybe 40-plus hours to finish. Then I don't know if there's another document, and I'm still excited to hear whether you're speaking—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I do have another document, but I may leave that to some of my colleagues.

Mr. Terry Beech: That's good to know. I was concerned because you've already mentioned that you might not necessarily be here on Friday, so as we search for resources for today, Friday, and potentially Monday, that timeline, even if we're able to get every available committee slot until the minister appeared, we'd be in trouble because now we'd have a minister who was here but we'd still have an unresolved resolution.

We've already cancelled witnesses for the food bank and others, and I'm just inquiring as to the Conservative position on what we are going to do if we get to a point where we haven't resolved Mr. Perkins' wonderful contribution to our committee, just so the minister can also prepare for her performance.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech, for that.

On the same point of order, MP Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Beech raises an excellent question actually, which is why, if we want to manage the committee appropriately, we would need to know, with respect to inviting witnesses, for how long the minister is available on Tuesday. Unless we find out that answer, I don't see how we could proceed at all.

As I hypothesized last week...I actually believe the minister wants to come for two hours. That's my own personal belief, but as I mentioned last week, it was the Prime Minister's Office that was a little uncomfortable about it for a whole bunch of reasons, but we need to know for how long she's available in order to appropriately manage the committee.

I understand we have a question out to the minister's office. I'm quite happy to walk over there and ask. I know exactly where the building is, the James Michael Flaherty Building. I know what floor it's on. I didn't work in that building but I have been in it, and I'm happy to walk over there before question period. I will do that, but if we don't have an answer from the minister, I don't see how we'll have a resolution before the end of this meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chambers.

Mr. Terry Beech: My question was for the clerk.

The Chair: This is on the timing.

Mr. Terry Beech: Just regarding the timing, Mr. Perkins has already stated that he's probably got 30 or 40 hours left in him—maybe more. We only have, let's call it, 20 hours of slots between now and the minister's arriving, so do we just keep the invitation outstanding or do we just wait and see what happens? What is the standard practice?

I'm sure there are other members who want to speak as well.

The Clerk: That is entirely the decision of the committee.

Mr. Terry Beech: What you are saying is we have to get to a resolution and probably have a vote to figure out what the committee wants to do before we can make any decisions.

Mr. Adam Chambers: On the same point of order, Mr. Chair, I only speak for myself.

The Chair: On the same point of order, MP Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you very much.

I only speak for myself and not on behalf of my fellow colleagues. I would be prepared to provide UC for the minister to appear if she were to appear on Tuesday and suspend the debate that we're currently having, but we would have to test that with the rest of the committee, and, of course, as I say, I only speak for myself and I might be a lone vote on that front. But there are ways in which this committee could arrange its affairs with unanimous consent to allow the minister to appear, should she, all of a sudden, walk through those doors on Tuesday.

We do not need to answer the question before she were to appear if we had unanimous consent.

Mr. Terry Beech: Just for my own clarity, you would suspend debate on the motion to invite the minister in order to allow the minister to appear, then you would resume debate on inviting the minister to appear. Is that what you're proposing?

Mr. Rick Perkins: If she hasn't appeared for two hours—

Mr. Adam Chambers: I believe the minister has agreed to appear on Tuesday, so there we go.

The Chair: Just for members again, the minister has emailed the committee and agreed to appear on Tuesday before our committee. The minister is prepared to appear on May 16 before our committee.

Mr. Terry Beech: I think I have my answer, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, PS Beech.

Guys, given the resources...we're going to suspend now.

[The meeting was suspended at 13:14 p.m., Thursday, May 11]

[The meeting resumed at 11:00 a.m., Tuesday, May 16]

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

We are resuming meeting number 87 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the debate on the motion by PS Beech, the amendment by MP Blaikie and the subamendment by MP Morantz in relation to the study of Bill C-47.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. With regard to interpretation, for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either the floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpieces and select the desired channel.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Members, before we commence, you should have received the budgets for our PBC travel as well as for the potential Paris travel.

I just want to see if we can adopt those budgets at this time. That is for the clerk.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, members. That is done.

On another note, a very important one, there have been some injuries to interpreters because of devices. There are popping sounds, etc., that happen. Try to keep the earpiece and the mike a little distance away...and make sure that your devices are a little bit away from the mikes. It has caused some injuries to our interpreters. We want to ensure that we do everything we can to stop that from happening.

When we last left off, MP Perkins had the floor. We're going to MP Dzerowicz after that.

MP Perkins, the floor is yours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I understand at some point that MP Beech may have something he wants to talk about.

Until then, I'll maybe just continue.

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm on the list as well.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You're on the list as well. That's great.

The Chair: We have to go through the list, as I understand it. It's MP Perkins and then I have Dzerowicz, and then it can go to Beech.

MP Ste-Marie has a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My apologies. I'm participating virtually, and I thought the Minister of Finance would be here for today's committee meeting. Since I'm not there in person, I can't tell whether she is actually in the room. Can you tell me?

[*English*]

The Chair: MP Ste-Marie, thank you for that.

Minister Freeland said that she would come before our committee today and make herself available. She has now, through her office, corresponded with the clerk. It's 12 o'clock when the minister will arrive.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go back to MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

If I could do a quick summary, I will then pass on my time to the next person on the list.

From the opposition's perspective, we've been having a discussion about ministerial accountability in this committee, in our effort to get Minister Freeland to attend and answer questions for two hours, not one hour, for her 2023 budget. It lays out a fiscal framework of spending \$3.1 trillion in the next five years.

We have been unable to get that commitment. I appreciate that the minister is now coming at noon, so we'll look forward to posing questions there.

I guess the skepticism we were pushing forward has obviously had some impact. On the three previous occasions in the last six months that the committee has invited the minister to attend, including on estimates, she was unable to attend. My understanding is that, under the Standing Orders, it's generally mandatory for ministers to attend estimates. The Minister of Finance did not.

We're happy that she's chosen to be here today.

In the 48 days, I think it's been since January, that the House has been sitting, the minister had, as of yesterday, attended seven times in question period. Hopefully today will be the eighth time in 49 days—if you include today—that she attends to answer questions about the impacts of this spending on the cost of living for Canadians.

With regard to the cost of living, as we know, we have record and persistent food inflation, which is hurting many families. It poses a lot of questions. We need to ask the minister about why, in spending this amount of money and adding \$130 billion to the national debt, she believes it will reduce inflation to make life more affordable for Canadians.

Mr. Chair, at that, I'll conclude my time.

Maybe I'll be put back on the speakers list, if I can, at the bottom. I'll pass it on to the others.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Perkins.

I have MP Dzerowicz and then MP Beech.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to pass along my time to the next speaker on the list, who is Mr. Beech.

The Chair: We're at PS Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a unanimous consent motion that I would like to feel out the room on, although having had some discussions, I think I know what the answer is. I'd like to try anyway.

I move "That the subamendment to Mr. Blaikie's amendment be withdrawn, that Mr. Blaikie's amendment be adopted on division, that Mr. Baker's previously circulated amendment be adopted on division and the motion as amended be adopted on division."

Would that be acceptable to everyone?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That would not be acceptable, but we thank the member for his efforts.

Mr. Terry Beech: That is not to be unexpected.

I also believe we may be able to come to an agreement on an alternative unanimous consent motion. I'd seek a few minutes to talk to my colleagues opposite, if we could suspend, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: With our agreement....

The Chair: Okay. We'll suspend.

• (1105) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1110)

The Chair: We're back.

Go ahead, PS Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all colleagues, including those opposite.

Thank you, Mr. Lawrence, for the discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Chambers, for your contribution in both clothing and discussion.

I want to give a brief statement, and then I have another motion I'd like to test for unanimous consent.

On April 19, which was not quite a month ago, we began discussions with all parties on a path forward to study the BIA, and we really, truly focused on trying to find a consensus position. We also tried to focus on improving our study from the year previous.

We did this in three ways. We allocated more time for witnesses. We agreed to send parts of the bill to committees, and we gave those committees more time to be able to do those studies. We also included the various aspects of the bill and which committees they would go to, which was also done by consensus, with everybody contributing to the process—the Bloc, the Conservatives and the NDP, as well as the Liberals.

We excluded a controversial part of that motion, which included an end date, because, given goodwill, if we agreed upon a study plan, no end date would be necessary and we would have more than enough time to study the budget implementation act.

This resolution was designed to be a consensus resolution, but it is our feeling that the Conservatives changed the goalposts consistently to justify never actually starting the study. This is, of course,

unfortunate, especially since this is similar to what happened last year.

Recently—as they did at the meeting today—they claimed that the minister would be unwilling to appear for two hours. This was despite assuring the committee that she would appear prior to May 18 in response to Gabriel Ste-Marie's question more than two weeks ago.

Since that assurance, we have faced more than 23 hours of Conservative filibustering. That is time that should have been given to food banks, the Chamber of Commerce and other Canadian stakeholders who could have helped us during all of that time to improve the budget implementation act.

Prior to all of this, we unanimously passed a prestudy motion. We were able to hear from departmental staff, and we sent an invite to the minister. It is that original invite that the minister responded to and it is the reason she is available here today.

What have the Conservatives been filibustering? It is an amendment to the original motion by Daniel Blaikie to invite the minister to appear for two hours. It is unfortunate—and somewhat confusing on our side—that they would filibuster this motion, given that it provides exactly what they were asking for. More importantly, however, it is unfortunate that we are in a position where the Conservatives have held up the study, despite the will of the majority of people who sit around this committee who wanted to proceed with the study.

However, I believe we should not waste this opportunity to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister. I believe that everyone around this table believes we should not waste this opportunity to meet with the Deputy Prime Minister.

In that spirit, and following a very productive discussion with my colleagues opposite, I would seek unanimous consent for the following motion: "That the committee temporarily and immediately suspend debate on the motion on the floor for the purposes of hearing testimony from the Deputy Prime Minister, starting at 12 p.m. on May 16; that during this appearance, no other motion be considered in order and we immediately suspend until her appearance; and that, following the Deputy Prime Minister's appearance, the committee resume debate on the current motion."

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

PS Beech, I do have a speaking order here. I've got—

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm sorry, it's a unanimous consent motion. I'm going to keep the floor unless that's passed.

The Chair: Okay. What's being ask for is UC—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have just a quick clarification. I know it's dilatory.

I think we're actually debating the subamendment to the motion. As long as everyone is fine with that, I'm good.

Mr. Terry Beech: That's true.

The Chair: It's the subamendment to the amendment by MP Blaikie and then it was MP Morantz's subamendment to PS Beech's motion.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Can I ask for a quick clarification, MP Beech?

Is there a time amount that the minister has suggested in that, which she will appear for?

Mr. Terry Beech: The motion states that she'll be here at 12:00 p.m.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's fine.

The Chair: Do we have UC, members?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We have unanimous consent for that.

We are suspended until the minister arrives.

• (1115) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: Members, we're back.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Chrystia Freeland, is with us, along with some officials.

Minister, I know that members are eager to hear what you have to say, so you're going to have an opportunity for some opening remarks, and then we will move to questions by members.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Thank you very much, Chair.

[*Translation*]

It's a pleasure to appear before you and the committee members to discuss the budget implementation bill.

I'd like to talk first about the state of Canada's economy. Last year, Canada posted the strongest growth of any G7 nation. In the first quarter of this year, Canada had stronger than expected economic growth. Some 900,000 more Canadians are working today than when the pandemic began, and at just 5%, the unemployment rate has remained near its record low for five straight months. We have recovered 129% of the jobs lost during the pandemic, compared with only 115% in the United States.

Inflation is now down to 4.4% after peaking at 8.1% last June. The Bank of Canada projects that inflation will drop to 3% this year and just 2.5% by the end of the year. Our deficit is projected to be lower than it was last year, down to just 1.4% of GDP. Our deficit and our debt-to-GDP ratio are the lowest in the G7 and lower than those of other large AAA-rated economies, such as Australia and the Netherlands.

This strong economic foundation underpinned the budget I delivered in March. Bill C-47 implements many of the key measures

outlined in our budget, which I think the committee members could get behind.

[*English*]

I'd like to talk about why it's so important that we work together to pass this legislation as quickly as possible. In our budget, we're cracking down on house flipping by fully taxing assignment sales, because homes should be for Canadians to live in, not a speculative financial asset class.

To protect Canadians, we're also cracking down on predatory lending by lowering the criminal rate of interest from 47% to 35%, and we're imposing a cap on the cost of total borrowing for payday loans of no more than \$14 per \$100 borrowed.

We're protecting air passengers' rights by making airlines more accountable for delays, cancellations and lost baggage, and ensuring that they compensate Canadians fairly for delays that are within the airlines' control.

We're modernizing the oversight of Canada's financial sector to ensure that our financial institutions act with integrity and that they're protected from threats of foreign interference.

To help make the cost of education more affordable for students across Canada, we're increasing withdrawal limits for RESPs from \$5,000 to \$8,000 for full-time students, and from \$2,500 to \$4,000 for part-time students.

To support the skilled tradespeople who are building our clean economy and working to double the number of new homes that Canada will build by 2032, we're doubling the tradespeople's tool deduction from \$500 to \$1,000, which will help them invest in the tools they need to do their important jobs.

We're expanding the Canada workers benefit to reach 4.2 million of our lowest and often most essential workers, and introducing quarterly payments that will put more of their hard-earned money back in their pockets sooner.

We're supporting the implementation of the new Canadian dental care plan, which will cover up to nine million Canadians by 2025. It will mean that in Canada you will no longer be able to tell how much money someone makes, or how much money their parents make, by their smile.

These are just some of the essential measures in the budget implementation act that are delivering on our plan to support Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I'm confident that members of this committee do support, and will support, these measures.

I'm looking forward to discussing it with all of you today.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Freeland, for those opening remarks.

We are going to move into the rounds of questions now. In the first round, each party will have up to six minutes to ask questions. We are starting with the Conservatives and MP Hallan, for six minutes, please.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'll acknowledge that the minister is here after multiple requests that she's ignored and refused to show up for, even though the Governor of the Bank of Canada has come regularly at the committee's request.

Minister, you said, "What Canadians want right now is for inflation to come down and for interest rates to fall. And that is one of our primary goals in this year's budget: not to pour fuel on the fire of inflation. So, in our budget, we will exercise fiscal restraint."

What we see, again, is that your government spending is causing inflation to go up, like it did again today. Your fall economic statement said that you would balance the budget in 2027-28, but after your \$43 billion budget bonanza, you say you won't balance the budget.

Why did you mislead Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair and MP Hallan, the only people who are trying, I think unsuccessfully, because Canadians are smarter than that, to mislead Canadians are the Conservatives on this committee and in the House.

The reality—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: What was the change? How come your budget didn't balance?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'm sorry...?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: That was a question.

The Chair: Member, MP Hallan, we don't want the crosstalk for many different reasons. First is just for the sake of decorum and respect here at this committee. The other is that the interpreters have often spoken to me and the clerk, etc., and said that they get affected by that crosstalk. We don't want their health and safety to be impacted.

Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to address the two substantive points that were raised in the question. They are fiscal responsibility and inflation.

When it comes to fiscal responsibility, let me emphasize a few points. Canada has the lowest deficit in the G7. Canada's fiscal position has been judged by the people who count the most, our ratings agencies, as—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Respectfully, Minister, I want to know what changed between—

The Chair: MP Hallan, allow the minister to finish her—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I only have limited time.

The Chair: We've stopped your time, but allow the minister—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: She's not answering.

The Chair: Again, there's the crosstalk. We don't want any crosstalk.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: The floor is mine.

The Chair: Allow the minister to complete her answer to your question.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: She's eating up a lot of time with that.

The Chair: She actually has not taken up that much time compared with the question. We'll allow the minister to continue.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'll wait a little bit.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you.

If the Conservatives really are interested, as they should be, in the substance of what's happening in the Canadian economy, I'm happy to answer.

On fiscal responsibility, Canada has the lowest deficit in the G7. We have a deficit that is steadily coming down—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: That wasn't the question, Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: —and we have....

You did speak about the deficit, actually.

We have a fiscal position—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Yes, but the question was—

The Chair: Again, I'm going to have to interrupt.

MP Hallan, address anything through the chair, please.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Chair, I'll move on from that question because the minister's not going to answer it.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'd actually like to finish my answer.

The Chair: Just allow for the finishing.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: The floor is mine.

The Chair: Minister, could you wrap up the answer and then we'll get to your next question, MP Hallan. We did stop the time.

Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you, Chair.

Canada has a fiscal position that has been judged by the people who count, our ratings agencies, to be strong and sustainable. S&P, after I tabled the budget, reiterated our AAA rating with a stable outlook.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: You're not going to get to the answer, so I'll have to move on with because my time is limited.

The Chair: MP Hallan, go ahead.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I have a simple question for you, just on the date. When will the budget be balanced? I just want the date.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: As I said, the Conservatives seem uninterested in substantive answers.

There was a question asked about inflation.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Canadians would like to know.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I think it is important to point out to Canadians that inflation is steadily coming down from its peak of 8.1% in June to 4.4%.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: The question was not about inflation.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The previous question was and I didn't have a chance to talk about inflation, which I think is on Canadians' minds.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Okay, so—

The Chair: MP Hallan, allow the minister, please, to conclude.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: It was a simple question.

The Chair: Minister.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Just a date.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Just to conclude on inflation, which I do think Canadians care about, it's come down from a peak of 8.1% to 4.4%. The Bank of Canada is forecasting that it will be at 3% in the summer and down to below 3% by the end of the year.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: The question was not about inflation; the question was about balancing the budget, which obviously the minister is avoiding, which means she has no proven plan, but is blowing through any type of fiscal restraint with her latest failed Liberal budget.

Minister, you said in the fall that the debt-to-GDP ratio is a red line that you would not cross. In budget 2023, you blew past that line for the debt-to-GDP ratio in the fall economic statement and increased it to 43.5%. Now the ratio of debt to GDP won't fall below 40% until 2027-28, when you still won't even balance your budget, in where you misled Canadians.

Considering your track record that might be optimistic. Why are you not serious about fiscal responsibility?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I am absolutely serious about fiscal responsibility, and I would urge Canadians and members of this committee not to be misled by overheated partisan rhetoric, and to listen to objective people we should trust.

Let me quote the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who explained to this committee, "When looking at G7 countries, Canada compares very favourably on net debt-to-GDP." The Parliamentary Budget Officer also described, for members of this committee, a conversation he had with Moody's, which told him that Canada's deficit should, according to the PBO, make us "quite happy because by European standards that's very low." That's an objective judgment.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: That's the same Parliamentary Budget Officer who said your financials are not "keeping one's powder dry" and your budget is not fiscally responsible.

I'll move on. On government spending, you said:

These are investments in our future and they will yield great dividends. In fact, in today's low-interest rate environment, not only can we afford these investments, it would be short-sighted of us not to make them.

Interest rates are high and the debt has doubled because your government has had out-of-control spending. Do you regret misleading Canadians with this statement?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I've already explained that, in the view of objective observers, Canada's fiscal position is strong and, indeed, enviable. I absolutely believe that—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, you're going to have one of the worst GDP-per-capita growths in the G7.

The Chair: MP Hallan, please, no crosstalk....

We're at the end of the time, but no crosstalk, please. I'd ask that of all members.

We are now moving over to the Liberals for six minutes.

I have MP Baker.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I have a point of order. I'll be very quick.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I say this to help everyone: I'm wondering whether we want to invoke, through UC, the Wayne Easter rule, where the answer will match the length of the question. It might avoid crosstalk and allow for a more orderly meeting.

I bring that up only to be helpful.

The Chair: I think, MP Lawrence, what would avoid crosstalk is stopping with the crosstalk and allowing for.... You could pose a question—be as long as you want in the question—then allow the minister to answer that question.

Go ahead, MP Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being with us here today.

Before I ask my first question, I need to say that I am incredibly disappointed by what I just heard from MP Hallan and the Conservatives. Mr. Hallan suggested that the minister had refused to appear. We knew weeks ago that the minister indicated she would be here today and available to appear. Instead of moving on, the Conservatives have spent the last 23 hours of this committee's time, which could have been used to study the budget, focus on making it better and address any concerns they have, serving Canadians.... Instead, they spent it talking about everything but what needed to be discussed, and filibustering a motion about the minister's appearance, which we already knew was going to happen. First of all, it's not true that the minister said she wasn't willing to appear. In fact, she indicated weeks ago that she was willing.

Now that the minister is here, instead of listening to what she has to say, the member across has the audacity to interrupt and heckle the minister and me. I think this shows that the Conservatives are completely uninterested in hearing what the minister has to say. This has nothing to do with having a substantive conversation about the budget and how we can improve the lives of Canadians. It has everything to do with scoring political points and obstructionism, and I think it's too bad. It's very disappointing.

Minister, I want to move to the questions I have to ask you.

First of all, I want to thank you for your continued hard work and collaboration in supporting the brave people of Ukraine. In the last budget, we earmarked \$2.4 billion in support for Ukraine. I have several questions as part of that.

The first is, how does this support compare with the support included in budget 2022—the prior year's budget? What would you say to those who have concerns that the \$2.4 billion is less than the over \$5 billion we spent to support Ukraine in 2022? I believe Canada has been a global leader in the support of Ukraine. How does our support compare to that of peer nations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Just to your preamble, Mr. Baker, I share your disappointment in the behaviour, specifically of the Conservatives. I guess none of us should be surprised, because Canada's economy is really strong.

I think that, clearly, the Conservatives simply don't want to have a substantive discussion about the strength of our economy or about Canada's outstanding performance relative to our G7 peers on all indicators—jobs, fiscal performance and growth—but I'm happy to talk about it.

I'm also really happy to talk about Ukraine. While we disagree about many things in this committee, I hope that something we can agree about here and in the House of Commons is the paramount, existential importance of the war in Ukraine. I hope that's something we can all support.

I do want to assure the Canadians who are listening that as Canadians, as a country, we can be proud of the role our country is playing in supporting the incredibly brave people of Ukraine.

When it comes to financial support, direct budget support to the government of Ukraine—which continues to function, which is paying pensions, which is rebuilding that electricity grid that gets pounded every night by Russia—Canada on a per capita basis in the G7 is contributing the most to support Ukraine. I think we should all be really proud of that.

Canada is also a world leader when it comes to our sanctions regime and our actions to seize and to confiscate assets.

I do want to thank all members of this committee, all members of the House, because it was in our budget implementation bill last spring that Canada improved our legislation, allowing us to have the world's strong asset seizure and confiscation regime. That is something other countries of the world are looking to. That is something that sanctions Russia, that deters Russia, and it is something that supports Ukraine.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Minister.

I have about 60 seconds left, so I'll be brief in my question, and I'll give you a little bit of time to answer, if I can.

Over the last couple of weeks, as I mentioned earlier, instead of studying the budget implementation act and working to propose enhancements or improvements to the bill, the Conservatives have filibustered this committee for over 23 hours. That's limited our ability to hear from witnesses, from Canadians who can provide input on how we can improve the bill and the impact that it would have on Canadians. If the Conservatives continue to filibuster our con-

sideration of the budget implementation act, this will delay its passage.

What has been the impact of their filibuster tactics to date, and what will they be if they continue?

You have about 30 seconds.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: There are two things.

One, it prevents the committee from having the substantive discussions that I think everyone here as a parliamentarian wants to have and that Canadians need us to be having.

Two, it delays our ability to deliver on really important things that I think we can all agree on, like an anti-flipping tax, a tradespeople tool deduction and delivering the Canada workers benefit in advance.

Those are things we should be able to agree on, and we should be working together to get them to Canadians.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I agree. Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Baker.

Thank you, Minister.

Now we are going to hear from the Bloc.

MP Ste-Marie, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister. I have a number of questions.

The first is about businesses that have told us how concerned they are regarding measures in Bill C-47. I'm talking about companies that run large IT servers on high-speed fibre optic networks and lease that data transfer and calculating capacity to the highest bidder.

Some of those companies' clients engage in cryptocurrency mining, whether in Canada or another country. Our understanding of Bill C-47—and the department officials confirmed this—is that companies exporting a service such as mining would no longer be considered to be performing a commercial activity eligible for the input sales tax credit. This means that the company would have to pay the tax, hurting their competitiveness.

That applies to the whole tax, and since Quebec's sales tax is higher than Alberta's, for example, this could incentivize companies to move the activity someplace where the energy is derived from fossil fuels. Can you reassure the industry? Are there any mitigation measures? What's the solution, and where do you stand on the matter?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for asking such tangible and serious questions, Mr. Ste-Marie. I very much appreciate it.

I want to assure you that my team and I are always open to continuing this discussion, because you've raised some very important issues. I won't have time to cover them all, but I will endeavour to address some of them.

You raised an excellent point about the provincial differences involved in doing business in Canada, and we need to continue that work. I think we can really support the country's economic growth by taking steps to further open up trade throughout the country.

You're right to bring up net-zero emissions. We really need to make sure we take a national approach, and that's what our government has done since the beginning. We are always open to continuing that work with you, with all the provinces, including Quebec, to ensure that the situation improves.

When it comes to your tax questions specifically, let me first say that we are prepared to continue the discussion with you directly and to give you all the details.

Regarding digitization, as you are well aware, the government is putting a lot of energy into the issue, through our international work with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as well as through Minister Pablo Rodriguez's work to support Canadian culture.

I know I didn't cover everything you asked about, but you raised a lot of complex issues. I will yield the floor so you can continue with your questions.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

We can connect later regarding the application of the GST/HST to exported services involving cryptocurrency mining activities.

I'll move on to my second question. Before you introduced Bill C-47 in the House, Bill C-46 was passed at all stages. That legislation doubled the GST credit and provided two billion dollars in health care funding.

The next day, we received Bill C-47, and those same measures were in it. In the news release accompanying Bill C-47, the government trumpets the passage of Bill C-46 by the House. Bill C-47 includes another two billion dollars for health care, which I support since the federal government's recently signed agreements with the provinces don't match their needs, in our view.

My understanding was that your government and your colleagues would be proposing an amendment to Bill C-47 to remove that additional two billion dollars, so that only the two billion dollars in Bill C-46 would be provided. Will you be making the vote on the amendment to remove the two billion dollars a confidence vote?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for your question.

Considering the obstructionist approach the Conservatives are taking, I would say we have reason to be very proud of proposing, and moving forward with, the grocery rebate and the investment in health care. We decided to separate these two essential measures, because our health care system and the most vulnerable need support now.

We understand what the Conservatives are doing, and that is why I want to thank every member of the House for moving these important measures forward. We did that, and it's a good thing.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We are well over time.

[Translation]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I can answer that in the next round, if you like.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Now we will go to MP Blaikie and the NDP, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

One thing that the budget implementation act does is empower the Public Sector Pension Investment Board to incorporate a subsidiary to manage the growth fund. One thing New Democrats have argued forcefully for, in partnership with folks like Gil McGowan at the Alberta Federation of Labour, is to have two seats for labour at the table that's making decisions about growth fund investments.

I understand that these are initial steps. There is more consultation to do on the exact governance structure of the growth fund.

I am looking to ask what the government's expected timeline is to present legislation legislating those two seats at the growth fund table for labour representatives.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much for the question.

I am glad you mentioned our mutual friend, Gil. It's a nice opportunity for me to really give him and organized labour credit for the work they have done in building this budget.

As you know, this budget—and in particular the green industrial policy in this budget—takes unprecedented action to ensure that the policies here include workers, unionized workers and guarantees of good-paying jobs.

That's a first in Canada. Gil was a very essential person in figuring that out.

I absolutely agree with you on the importance of worker representation at the growth fund. The first step there, as you know, is that in the budget we announced that we're going to consult unions this spring on adding two seats to the PSP Investment Board for representatives of organized labour.

As you know, it is the PSP that is in charge of managing the growth fund. We're aiming to legislate this change in the fall of 2023.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

Just by way of participating in the preambulatory remarks about your presence at committee, I do think there is a standing invitation for you to appear quarterly. We've seen the Governor of the Bank of Canada come. There are invitations in the context of the study on inflation.

We've spent a fair bit of time around this table arguing about an extra hour of your presence. I would encourage you to, in the future, consider committing to coming for the full two hours. I certainly would have much preferred to spend the last 23 hours listening to Canadians about their own thoughts and views about the content of the budget implementation act. Instead, I listened to Conservative colleagues around the table.

I think some more generosity with your time at this table may help us overcome some of these challenges because your presence has become, unfortunately, an issue in respect of the well-functioning of this committee. It's Canadians who are missing out because we do have an important job to do around this table. Conflicts about your presence or lack thereof are definitely getting in the way of that work. Anything you can do to facilitate better operations at this committee table would certainly be welcome for me. I won't speak for others, although I imagine it would be welcome from those who spent so much time beseeching your presence.

I would certainly remind them how much time they spent trying to get you here and encourage them to use the time well instead of continuing the bickering that we have seen for so long now that we do have an opportunity to talk to you about the legislation.

In that spirit, I want to come back to an issue that you've heard me talk about before, that I've asked you about before and that I am concerned the government hasn't taken the opportunity in the BIA to address. It is the allocation of \$25 billion of CERB debt to the employment insurance account.

Your government has been promising meaningful EI modernization since 2015. In fact, we saw it during the pandemic because the EI program was so inadequate that it couldn't bear the burden placed on it by the pandemic.

Without much notice, your government cancelled those temporary measures in September. I think most people thought that meant that a significant modernization of EI was in the wings. Not only has that not happened, but it seems to me that asking EI ratepayers—both employers and employees—to pay off \$25 billion of CERB debt, which doesn't properly belong on the EI account, means that the government's wings are clipped in respect of meaningful EI modernization. The room that would have gone towards contributing to a higher-income replacement rate, towards the cost of having a universal lower hours threshold and towards things of that nature are instead going to pay down a CERB debt, which should be happening off the general ledger.

I am wondering if you want to take what time I have remaining to give a little bit of an explanation as to why the government is dead set on having EI ratepayers pay off a significant chunk of CERB debt instead of using that room within the premium to improve the program.

The Chair: Minister, you have about 30 seconds or so.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: In that case, I'm going to go to your first point, Mr. Blaikie. I very much appreciate your effort to pour oil on the troubled waters of this committee. One thing that I learned—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: As long as it's not subsidized oil—it's important to say....

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: It's Canadian oil—maybe canola oil.

One thing that I learned during the NAFTA negotiations is that appeasing a bully never works, and that tends to be my approach in life. I've also seen nothing in the conduct of these Conservatives—and I would contrast that, for example, with the behaviour of former finance critic Ed Fast—to actually show a serious desire to engage on the serious economic issues before our country.

You may be more trusting than I am, but I've learned from experience. I'm delighted to be here today, because the Canadian economy is strong, and I'm happy to talk about that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, MP Blaikie.

Now we are on to our second round. This will be our final round. We have the Conservatives up. We have MP Morantz for five minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, in this budget there is an additional \$798 million in new, unannounced spending. There's now \$12 billion in total non-announced spending, for which you've provided no specific details. I'm wondering if you would table with the committee the details of the spending.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thanks for the question.

In the budget, we provide extensive details on the spending and on its composition. There have been some areas, for example, the very important investment in Volkswagen, where, for reasons of commercial confidence and ensuring that Canada is attractive as an investment destination—

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm sorry, but the question is about the non-announced spending, though. Could you give us the details?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: We, in the budget itself—

Mr. Marty Morantz: What are you tabling?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: —had to be careful. As you know, when it comes to Volkswagen, we have now offered the full details, and we continue to work on attracting other investments of that kind, because Canada needs it.

Mr. Marty Morantz: All right. There are no details on the non-announced spending, I take it.

On November 3, in the fall economic statement, you said that by 2028 there would be a \$4.5-billion surplus. That was only 144 days before you tabled the budget. In the budget, that same table in 2027-28 showed a \$14-billion deficit, which amounts to an \$18.5-billion swing in that year. How could you or your departmental officials have been so wrong just 144 days earlier, by being out by \$18.5 billion in the 2027-28 forecast?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: MP Morantz, I respect you too much to think that you do not understand very much how the budget projections are built; but maybe some Canadians listening will have been misled by your question, so let me explain something very elementary—

Mr. Marty Morantz: With the greatest respect, it's not misleading. It's in the table.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: No, but let me be clear.

The Chair: Minister and MP Morantz—

Mr. Marty Morantz: I take exception to that. I don't mislead people, Minister. I am just telling you what is in your own budget—

The Chair: Mr. Morantz—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I said people may have been misled by your question.

The Chair: —just allow for the answer to be—

Mr. Marty Morantz: No, I disagree. But anyway, proceed.

The Chair: Okay. We'll allow for the answer. Then, MP Morantz, you'll have the floor.

Go ahead.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The truth is that Canada's budgetary practice going back to the early eighties is actually really smart, and it's nothing to do with me and this particular government. It's how all budgets have been done since then. The fiscal projections—the sort of base scenario of what we believe is going to happen to growth, to inflation, to the price of oil, those kinds of key components—are not figured out by smart Finance officials like the people sitting with me. They come from the projections of private sector economists and the average of their projections.

Mr. Marty Morantz: There's no answer, unfortunately, on that, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: No, there actually is an answer, and there has—

The Chair: Let's allow for a conclusion.

Minister, if you could just—

Mr. Marty Morantz: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'll wrap up quickly, yes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Point of order, MP Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz: The minister, on this question, has had at least twice as much time now than I took to ask the question. I would like my time back so I can move on.

The Chair: MP Morantz, I did not look at the time, I'll be honest with you.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I've been looking at it.

The Chair: Just allow the minister to conclude, and then we'll get to your question.

Minister?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The basic point is that the projections of private sector economists about the direction of the Canadian economy changed significantly between September of last year and the beginning of this year, and that led to a meaningful swing in the underlying—

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Chair, she's not answered the question.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

MP Morantz go ahead.

Mr. Marty Morantz: She's gone on [*Inaudible—Editor*] four times. I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, on a point of order.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I want to make it clear that the idea is that we ask a question and the response takes roughly the same amount of time. It doesn't have to be to the second, but her response was three or four times longer than my question. I'd like some time back so I can ask her—

The Chair: MP Morantz, you have time right now. We did pause the time, so you have an opportunity.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I know and you have another point of order, but I think we need to solve this problem.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I have a point of order.

The Chair: On a point of order, MP Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Chair, the Conservatives are asking questions of the minister on topics that are complex and require the minister time to be able to answer them. It shouldn't be hard for the Conservatives to understand that. In this particular case, the minister took more time to respond to the question than Mr. Morantz took in asking it. But in most of the cases so far, what has happened is that they've taken time to ask the question, and before the minister has had equal time, they've interrupted and heckled her. I would ask you, Chair, to allow the minister to —

Mr. Marty Morantz: On that point of order.

The Chair: MP Baker, just on these points of order, all the members know—

MP Morantz, allow me to just—

Mr. Marty Morantz: I have not—

The Chair: —for the entire committee here and the minister and all those watching, ask you to go back and look at all our meetings to see that I have actually been very flexible on time, and I do allow more time—

Mr. Marty Morantz: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair:—for questions.

Mr. Marty Morantz: And with that, do I have—

The Chair: MP Morantz, on that, what you could take from that comment that I just made was I am very flexible on time.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

The Chair: Just take from that—

Mr. Marty Morantz: I appreciate that.

The Chair:—and get on to your question and we'll hear from the minister. We have this opportunity right now. Let's seize it.

Mr. Marty Morantz: And in that spirit, I would like to cede the rest of my time to my colleague, Mr. Perkins.

The Chair: MP Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister.

From the last answer, I take it that the blame is on the bank economists, not you for spending too much money. But I'll go on to my question.

I think you said earlier in response to a question on the \$12 billion in unallocated spending in this budget that it's to cover things like the Volkswagen \$13-billion production subsidy. Could I ask how a production subsidy gets paid in this fiscal year when the plant is not built?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me respond by asking what the position of the Conservative Party is on our investments—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Chair, but that wasn't my question. Since she won't answer the question about the \$13 billion....

Your colleague, the Minister of Industry, and you were very bullish on this contract. The minister has said that there is an ROI report that says that within five years there will be a return on investment on the \$14 billion. Will you table that report with this committee since the minister at the industry committee basically said he didn't know where the report was?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The Minister of Industry is a fantastic colleague and I am very glad to be working with him on bringing investment to Canada, and what Canadians deserve to know is what is the view of the Conservative Party on bringing these essential investments to Canada? Canadians support what we are doing.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We'll answer that when—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, we're past time. As I said, I'm flexible on time, so I'm going to allow the minister to answer and then we are moving on to the next questioner.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We'll answer—

The Chair: Yes, so allow the minister to answer and then we're moving onto MP Dzerowicz.

Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I think I have answered. We believe in attracting investment to Canada and Canadians support that. I think Canadians would like to know what the position of the Conservative Party is on that essential issue.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morantz and MP Perkins.

Now we go to MP Dzerowicz for five minutes please.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, for joining us today.

Before I get to my first question, I just want to address two things. One is the very thoughtful comments by Mr. Blaikie about your visiting this committee. I put it on record that you have visited us at least four times during this Parliament and you've always shown up for every single BIA. I think it's important for Canadians to be reminded of that.

The other thing I want to address is a comment by Mr. Hallan about out-of-control spending. I think sometimes because so much happens in our lives, we have short memories, but we have come out of an unprecedented global pandemic. When we came out of it, we had an extraordinarily changed geopolitical situation, and I will tell you and remind Canadians that our government absolutely spent a large amount of money. We did that because we had to help Canadians get through COVID. The spending has saved lives, the spending has saved livelihoods, the spending has saved businesses and it's provided a foundation from which our economy has pivoted. We have pivoted and this is why, at this moment, we do have the best debt-to-GDP ratio of the G7 countries, and we've had more than a full recovery of jobs and continue to maintain a AAA credit rating among other things.

I just wanted to put that on the record.

I'll go to my first question. In my riding of Davenport, as is the case in many of our ridings, there are a number of advocacy groups, so I have a huge contingent—and I'm one of them by the way—of climate activists and people who really want our government to move as quickly as possible to achieving our Paris Agreement targets and net zero by 2050.

I also have an equally important and active group who are very passionate about making sure that we continue to have good jobs and a strong economy, because they care not only about themselves, but also about their kids and that those kids in turn will have a strong future.

Can you explain to the residents of Davenport why it's important for us to invest in the clean economy with such substantial investments via the tax credits announced in federal budget 2023, what it means for the Canadian economy moving forward and how that will help us achieve our net zero by 2050 target?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: First of all, thank you for the important point about the investments our government has made in Canadians and about the strength of Canada's fiscal position. It's really important for us all to be clear about that, so that Canadians understand the reality and are not misled by fiscal scaremongering.

On the clean economy and climate action, I'm very happy to speak through you directly to the people of Davenport. As you know, our ridings are neighbours, so your constituents are my neighbours.

I also thank you for your energetic advocacy of our government's climate agenda and I agree with you that we should all be climate activists.

I think when people look back on the budget that we are all ultimately going to pass, I think what history is going to show is that this was the budget that really kicked Canada's green industrial transformation into high gear with a worker-led agenda. I really believe that.

Through some of the unpleasantness, I just remind myself that we're doing that important work together.

With this budget, our government has now put forward a \$120 billion green industrial policy. This is going to accelerate our work on reducing Canada's emissions and, crucially, it's going to create a lot of great jobs.

Three things made me really happy after the budget. One was S&P reiterating our AAA rating with a stable outlook—an important proof point. The second was TD coming up with a judgment about our budget and saying that Canada has done it and that we are now totally competitive as an investment destination when it comes to the clean economy. The third was Rystad Energy, a highly respected energy analytical firm, coming to exactly the same judgment of what Canada has done.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Dzerowicz.

That is the time. It goes quickly.

We have MP Ste-Marie now for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I have two questions about the \$80 billion earmarked for the green shift and transition we talked about.

Pursuant to Bill C-47, that money will be administered by two institutions and thus evade Parliament's control. The department told us that there was a lot of money to support the oil and nuclear industry. Quebec is receiving some funding, but I was a bit envious, I must say, when I saw how much was going to Stellantis and especially Volkswagen. I wish Quebec would have gotten a game-changing investment like that.

Here, in front of all the committee members, can you assure me that Quebec will get its fair share of that \$80 billion per capita? Furthermore, why are you putting that funding beyond Parliament's control?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The answer to your first question is a very clear yes. I repeat, yes, Quebec will get its fair share. Every province and region in Canada will get its fair share of green transition funding. I'm glad you asked the question, because it gives me a chance to tell all Canadians how important it is to me personally that our green investments be guided by regional equity.

I want to assure you that we are working closely with the Province of Quebec. Right now, we are discussing the implementation of our green plan for Quebec. I really like what Quebec and Quebecers are doing to support the green transition. They are activists. The federal government is here to help the transition and make further investments—and we will continue to be here. I would be delighted to work with you directly on those important efforts.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next we have MP Blaikie, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to come back to the employment insurance question that you didn't have time to answer before.

Prepandemic, we had an inadequate EI system and premiums that were designed to adequately fund the inadequate system. Then during the pandemic, we had temporary changes. I don't think it was ever envisioned that the premiums structure that was in place for the inadequate system before the pandemic would be able to fund the changes from the pandemic. Now we're back to having the inadequate system, which is a retroactive burden on ratepayers to try to make up for what was spent during the course of the pandemic on an EI system that was nothing like what the premiums were designed to pay.

I would like an explanation as to why it is that the government thinks it's appropriate to back charge the EI system for what was, we hope, a once in a generation or longer event, and how the government intends to fund a meaningful modernization of employment insurance while the account is trying to pay back that debt.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for the question, which is important and complicated.

I want to start where you started. I believe, as Julie pointed out, both the EI system and CRA together, with the government and a Parliament that had the will to do it, we really managed to be there for Canadians during the pandemic. It's something I'm proud of. It saved lives, because it allowed us to do the right thing when it came to health, and it also rescued many families and people. It cost a lot of money, but it was the right thing to do, and I'm glad we did it.

In terms of what we do going forward, I am very glad that our government resisted, in the summer and fall of last year, irresponsible pressure from the Conservatives to cut contributions to EI and the CPP. Those would have impoverished the systems that working Canadians and Canadian seniors depend on.

I want to remind members of this committee, and Canadians listening, that fiscally irresponsible policy was advocated aggressively by the Conservatives. We held firm. I'm proud that we did. I'm proud that both contribute to our overall fiscal responsibility as a government and to the fiscal sustainability of these two essential systems, EI and CPP.

In terms of EI modernization, as you know, this budget takes some important steps in that direction with regard to seasonal work. Our government has extended the number of weeks people can be on EI for sick leave, and I am very supportive of that. There is more work to do on EI modernization. It's a very complicated system, and it's really important for us to approach EI modernization with the appropriate degree of care. That is what we intend to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and MP Blaikie.

We'll now go to MP Chambers for five minutes.

Mr. Adam Chambers: It's nice to see you again, Minister, and thank you for coming.

Can you tell the committee, and Canadians, how much we're spending, or projected to spend, on interest on the debt this upcoming fiscal year? I'm just looking for the number.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: It's important to put things in context, that in both—

Mr. Adam Chambers: Minister, my time is very limited. I'm asking, do you know the number? You have many officials beside you.

Will you tell Canadians how much we're going to spend on servicing the debt next year?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: It's really important to put numbers in context. Without context, numbers are meaningless. Our debt service charges are low in a historical context, and they are low compared with what our peers in the G7 are paying.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you for the context.

What's the gross dollar value we're going to spend on interest on the debt next year?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me again...I am really opposed to fiscal fearmongering by the Conservatives. The important point to make for Canadians is that in a historic context, our debt service charges are reasonable and sustainable, and lower than they have been in many previous years. That's why S&P reaffirmed our AAA rating.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I'm asking, will you tell Canadians how much we're spending on the debt? It's in black and white in your book.

Do you just not want to say?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: It's important to put all numbers in context,—

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Minister. I'll move to the next question.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: —and do you not agree that in a historic context, our debt service charges are absolutely handleable?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Minister, how much are we projecting to send to the provinces for health care this year? Again, I'm looking for the number.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'm very glad to hear the Conservatives talk about health care. As you know, in this budget, our government made a historic investment of nearly \$200 billion in health care. As we discussed with Mr. Ste-Marie, thanks to the unanimous consent of the House, we're sending \$2 billion to the provinces right away to meet immediate needs.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Minister.

I'm not really sure how to proceed. We either ask a question that has a definitive, fact-based answer and don't get a response or ask a philosophical question. The truth is we're going to spend about \$43 billion or \$45 billion servicing the debt next year. We're projecting sending the provinces about \$47 billion for health care.

We're spending almost as much on servicing the debt as we are spending on health care in this country. It bothers me that we're not willing to admit this. For some reason, we don't want to discuss that actual fact when it was this government, and you in particular, that said it would be irresponsible not to spend because interest rates are so low.

When you have a party, you have to pay the band. We're now seeing that you have to pay the band.

If we can't answer the fact-based question, I'll ask a philosophical question.

Do you consider yourself a Keynesian?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I consider myself a Liberal.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Okay.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I consider myself a fiscally responsible finance minister who has found the balance that Canada needs between compassion and investments in our economic capacity, while maintaining a strong fiscal position.

Since we are discussing economic philosophy, which I actually think is the really correct and meaningful subject of discussion at this committee, I do think there is a clear philosophical difference between Conservatives and Liberals when it comes to the Canadian economy right now.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: We believe in investing in health care—

Mr. Adam Chambers: I have one final question—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: We believe in investing in child care. We believe in investing in a green transition. If the Conservatives don't agree to do that, they should be clear.

The Chair: Minister and MP Chambers, please, let's not have cross-talk.

MP Chambers, I know you're always very strict on your time, but I am allowing flexibility with your time.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you.

Many people in this room in the government have said they like Keynes. Everyone gets the first part, which is that in a downturn or in economic uncertainty, we must spend. They always forget the second part, which is you have to pay the money back.

Through an entire cycle, we haven't paid any money back. The government said it was just going to run a couple of small deficits when it started. Now, they're as far as the eye can see.

I appreciate that you've come here to committee today. I think Mr. Blaikie has had some good suggestions.

Part of the reason we're having trouble is that we've asked you to come on a couple of different occasions and at least quarterly until inflation comes back down.

Will you return, when the governor returns to this committee, to answer more questions specifically about inflation? That invitation has been made.

Can we count on you coming back when the governor comes back?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: You've made a whole bunch of assertions and I'm going to take them one by one.

On fiscal responsibility, as I said, I think there is a real, genuine difference of view between the Conservatives and the Liberals. We believe in investing in Canada and in Canadians. We believe in investing in our country's economic capacity. We believe in investing in the green transition. I don't think the Conservatives believe in that, although the Conservatives have refused to put forward a positive economic policy, so it's hard to tell.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Respectfully, Minister, the question is, will you come back to the committee? That's the question.

The Chair: The time is now well well past, so we will now move to our final questioner. That will be—

Mr. Adam Chambers: It's not well past.

I would like to give the minister an opportunity to respond to this simple question of whether she's coming back.

The Chair: MP MacDonald.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Chair.

Maybe I'm the last speaker; I don't know. I'm sitting here listening to my colleague, the honourable member for whom I have the utmost respect, call COVID a party. I'm not sure about his province, but it sure as hell wasn't a party in my province.

I want to thank the minister and the government for the investments they made in health care. There's not a person on Prince Edward Island, which I represent, who would refute the investments that we're making in health care.

Our economy has shown resilience against many shocks, including the illegal invasion of Ukraine and COVID-19, both of which have placed many external pressures on our economy and economies globally.

You look at the fiscal responsibility of budget 2023 and the targeted spend that you created. When you listen to people like the

Governor of the Bank of Canada and his response, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and the previous governor and many economists, they all say the same thing: If Canada wasn't in the position that we were in prior to COVID-19, we wouldn't likely be having these conversations here today.

You're going to go down in the history books as being a tremendous Minister of Finance who took this country through tumultuous times.

Back to health care, I want to be quick on health care. I was pleased, obviously, with the investments and the targeted investments.

Can you just expand on what those investments are going to do for the provinces?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Yes, I sure can.

I do think, once we got past some of the sound and fury, we have been getting to, in this conversation today, some of the really important philosophical and policy choices that are before Canadians right now.

I think the big choice is this: Do you believe in investing in Canada, and investing in our social welfare system and our economic capacity, while maintaining a fiscally responsible path, or do you not support those investments?

I really think, at the end of the day, that's the economic political choice before Canadians. The answer for me is 100% clear. We do need to find a balance between fiscal responsibility and compassion. S&P tells me we've done the fiscally responsible side of that, and we have also made the investments we need to keep the Canadian economy going and to keep Canadians healthy and safe starting with the investment in health care.

Going back to the fiscal responsibility issue that we were discussing a minute ago, I really think the Conservatives have to look at themselves in the mirror and ask this: How can they talk about fiscal responsibility when they were calling for us to cut EI premiums and to cut our contributions to the CPP? That is not fiscal responsibility. That is fiscal recklessness. Our government believes in doing the tough things that you need to do to make compassionate investments in Canadians and to be fiscally responsible. That's what this budget does. We're going to keep on doing that.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a quick point of order.

I would like to invite the minister to stay for an extra hour. I think she's acquitted herself very well today. I think she would do well to be here for another hour, and the rest of the committee would do well by having her here.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That is not a point of order.

The Chair: That is not a point of order, MP Lawrence.

We have a minute and half with MP MacDonald.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

I cede my time to my colleague.

The Chair: MP Chatel, you have the last minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the honourable member. If we hadn't had all those points of order, I might have had a chance to ask a question. Don't be too disappointed. I'm the one who should be.

Minister, thank you for meeting with the committee, even though we weren't able to invite you formally.

One of the very important measures in the budget pertains to the general anti-avoidance rule amendments. There's a lot of talk about fiscal prudence, but fundamentally, we need to ensure the integrity of our tax system. Can you tell us why those measures are important for Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for your question, Mrs. Chatel. I very much appreciate your expertise as an economist and someone who used to work at the Department of Finance. Your old colleagues are here today, as are your new ones.

I firmly believe in the importance of a fair tax system. We talked about the importance of investing in Canada's economy, in the green transition and in health care, but to make those investments, we need revenue. To have revenue, we need a tax system that is fair and efficient. That is why we got rid of tax loopholes in the budget, and I want to thank Mr. Jovanovic and his team for their work. This is very important, and it's one of the reasons why the political game-playing really needs to stop. We have to keep doing this work.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Freeland.

Thank you, Mrs. Chatel.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Minister Freeland and your officials, for appearing before our committee. Thank you for being with us and for answering many of the members' questions.

I do see your hand up, Minister Freeland.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Yes.

You know, I was taught as a child in Sunday school, as many of us were, that "Blessed are the peacemakers". Much as I really believe that appeasing bullies is a mistake, that's an important lesson, too. In response to the peacemaking plea of Daniel, if people have the time and the energy, I'd be happy to hang out for as much time as the committee has available today—before question period. I'll have to leave at question period.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'll have to leave at question period, but between now and question period, I'm happy to talk some more, if your talking points haven't run out, gentlemen.

The Chair: Minister Freeland, that's gracious of you.

I have confirmed with the clerk that we have till 1:30, so that's almost another 20 minutes, members. If members are good with that, I will divide the time equally. We could maybe stretch it a few minutes past that.

Okay, so it will be about five minutes per party. We'll do it that way. That's how we usually do it.

We'll start with the Conservatives for five minutes.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Could we have a footnote here to credit to Mr. Blaikie for his peacemaking efforts? He's the guy who won me over.

The Chair: The analysts, I'm sure, have captured that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Absolutely.

Thank you to Daniel. It's fitting there should be a biblical reference, with Daniel being the son of a preacher man and a regular peacemaker on this campaign.

I want to start with a "thank you", too.

I'm going to tell tales a bit out of school. I hope you don't mind, Minister.

You met me and my kids—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: It depends on what the tales are.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: You met me and my kids in the elevator. My kids were at the end of the day and were wrangling a little, but you were incredibly kind to them, and I'm sure you've made a memory for them. Thank you for that.

It's that very issue that I want to talk to you a bit about.

I come from the riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South, right on the 401. If you're driving between Toronto and Ottawa, you'll go through our riding. We have a number of food banks in our riding. You can look at the numbers—1.5 million across Canada—but I've been to those food banks and I've seen children there. It's not a pretty picture of where Canada is.

You've pointed out a number of times that the economy is roaring and it's great. Do you not see some of the issues that are forecast in your own budget? You forecast that 300,000 Canadians will lose their job this year and that inflation will still stay relatively high, at over 4%.

We also have structural problems in our economy with respect to productivity decreasing. We also have the OECD predicting our per capita GDP growth to be 0.7%, which will be the lowest in all of the OECD.

I would love to share your optimism, but do you not also share some of concerns that we have, as we have record food bank usage, forecast unemployment increases and structural challenges, such as our productivity and innovation gap?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for that important and serious question, and please say hi to your kids. They were very charming and they cheered me up at the end of a busy day.

As you guys know, as a champion of early learning and child care and the Canada child benefit, I am a mother of three. I think we're all pro-family, but I really believe in supporting Canadian kids and families. That, by the way, includes the kids of people here. Our kids all do make sacrifices. They have interesting lives, but they make sacrifices. I was glad to say hi to your kids.

To your core question, of course I worry. It's agonizing for me. There is a food bank at the end of my street. It's actually at my local church, The Church of the Messiah, where we go. When I can, I go there on a Wednesday to help out.

There are now quite a few people who don't speak English—Ukrainians—who are there. I'm sorry, it breaks my heart. People in my congregation ask me to come when I can so I can speak Ukrainian to the people. There was one family, a grandmother and a mother. The food at the food bank is great, but it's a mixed bag. There was food that they didn't really know. There happened to be a pannetoni, which they hadn't seen before, and also lots of taco stuff. This mother and grandmother were saying, this is interesting, maybe we can find a way to give it to the kids for lunch. I talked to them. The dad is in Ukraine fighting on the front line. I said to them, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry this has happened to you. I am so sorry that it's so hard. They said to me, please don't be sorry. We're just grateful that we're here in Canada, and we're safe, and that we can get these interesting foods we've never eaten before and give them to our kids for lunch. They're mazing people.

I would love to live in a Canada where there are....

I'll finish on the food bank quickly. I don't mean to.... I'm not trying to run the clock here.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: No, no, I know you're not, Minister. I'm not completely heartless.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: No, seriously, look, we disagree about lots of stuff. I would love to live in a Canada where we didn't have any food banks.

One reason that I am glad that we separated the grocery rebate from everything else is that it means we can get that money to people by July 5. The people who get that rebate really need it.

Is that money going to support every single person in Canada as much as I would like, as much as you would like? Look, I know we disagree about a lot of stuff. I think we here are all people of good will. I think all of us don't want there to be a single child in Canada who goes to bed hungry tonight, but there will be some.

Would I like to be able to give cheques to everybody so that no one goes hungry tonight? I would love it, but I actually—and I know Conservatives don't really believe this, but you should—believe in fiscal responsibility, too. What I have tried to do in this

budget and what I tried to do last year is find that balance between compassion and fiscal responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you. We're at time.

MP Lawrence, do you want to make a quick comment?

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Yes, it will be 15 seconds.

Thank you for appearing. Like I said, I think you have acquitted yourself very well today. I would invite you to come back.

I'll just make one quick comment. The difference between Liberals and Conservatives—and I believe this—is that Liberals want to give cheques to everyone who needs them. I don't want anyone to need a cheque.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are now going to the Liberals. I have MP Chatel, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am a Liberal, and I agree that we should not be handing out cheques to everyone. That shouldn't be something people need. That's why we believe in the economy. I don't think the honourable member's comment was quite true.

Minister, as you mentioned, I spent 20 years working in taxation, mostly international. I saw a tremendous amount of tax avoidance. I worked in both the private and public sectors. During my two decades in the field, I can tell you that Canada lost hundreds of billions of dollars in tax revenue to schemes.

Treaty shopping comes to mind. Alta Resources, a foreign company that develops our natural resources, made \$380 million in revenue without paying tax on it in Canada. AMECO is another such company. Foreign companies developing our natural resources made \$8 billion in revenue that the government couldn't collect tax on. That takes away revenue we could use to build hospitals, housing and other important infrastructure. You were talking about food banks. We could give them more funding if we had the money from that untaxed revenue.

Two measures in the budget are going to be especially helpful. I commend you on your courage, because you need it to strengthen the system. You took the bull by the horns in dealing with big international corporations that avoid paying Canadian tax. Thank you.

I want to discuss two things. The first is the OECD's pillar two. We spoke about your trips to the G7 and G20 summits. Thanks to your leadership, international companies will have to pay a minimum 15% tax rate, regardless of where in the world they are based. That is the work you are doing through the OECD on pillar two.

I would like you to talk specifically about how you plan to change the general anti-avoidance rule. The changes appear in the supplementary information document, which I consult directly because it's a great reference, in my view. The important changes you're proposing to the general anti-avoidance rule are under way. Tell us about the process, if you don't mind. Will we see it in the next budget implementation bill? Where are you in the consultation process? I read the amendments you're proposing, and I quite like them.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: If I may, Mrs. Chatel, I'd like to finish answering Mr. Lawrence's important question first.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Of course.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you, Mrs. Chatel.

Mr. Lawrence, I'm going to follow up on your comment.

[English]

Actually, I agree. I want a Canada where everyone has a great job or a great pension because they worked hard all their life. In fact, that is why I believe so strongly in some investments that we're making in this budget and that we made in previous budgets. That's why I believe in our investment in early learning and child care. It is not only great for kids who have great child care; it's great for parents who can go out and get a job—especially mothers—and support their families.

That's why I really believe in what we're doing in this BIA on the Canada workers benefit. I hate this reality about the Canadian economy, and I hope working together we can change this, but there are a lot of people in Canada today who work really hard every day, and who do some of the hardest jobs—less glamorous and fun than our jobs—like the people who are going to clean up this building when we leave today. A lot of those essential workers can work really hard and they can have a job, and they still don't make enough to make ends meet. That's why I'm a big believer in the Canada worker benefit. We've increased it, and we're paying it in advance.

That is also why—and Daniel has spoken about this—our focus during the COVID recession was, and afterward has been.... If you said to me, "What's the one indicator or what's the one data point you want to optimize?", I would say jobs, jobs, jobs.

On that measure, Canada has done remarkably well. We have recovered 129% of the jobs compared with prepandemic levels, compared with the depths of COVID and compared with 115% in the U.S. That's 900,000 more jobs. I repeat that for the reasons you raised.

I want all Canadians to have a great life, and I believe that a great life starts with a great, well-paying job, doing work you care about and that is respected, knowing that when you get older...knowing that when you get sick, you have a health care system that can take care of you, knowing that your kids are in a great early learning and child care centre, and knowing that when you retire

after a life working hard building our country, you're going to have a great pension.

That is my focus. I hope it's a focus for all of us.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, MP Chatel.

Now we are going to the Bloc and to MP Ste-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by commending Mrs. Chatel for her comment on tax evasion and tax avoidance.

What you said about food banks was very moving, Ms. Freeland. Thank you. I think we are all united in the fight against poverty.

During the pandemic, you were there to support the economy and help everyone out. There's something this bill doesn't address, however—the employment insurance, or EI, fund. The deficit in the EI fund was not shifted to the consolidated revenue fund, so it wasn't absorbed. The Employment Insurance Act requires that the fund be balanced over seven years. Short of amending the Employment Insurance Act to transfer the pandemic-related deficit to the consolidated revenue fund, the government intends to take \$17 billion from the pockets of EI contributors. This means it will be impossible to reform the system to make it more accessible. There is nothing in Bill C-47 to prevent this tragedy. Why?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for your question.

I agree with you. Mrs. Chatel raised a very important issue. I want to thank you for the work you are doing to address tax evasion, in fact. I think we've made a lot of progress together. We've made Canada's system better, but I think we still have work to do. I would be very glad to work with all members. Food banks are just one facet of the issue. We need a fair tax system where everyone pays their fair share. That's how we will be able to help those who are less fortunate.

As for EI, Mr. Blaikie asked almost the same question. I'll answer it in three parts.

First, we have to work together to improve and modernize the EI system.

Second, you may not agree with me, but I think the cornerstone of my work as finance minister is finding the right balance between compassion and fiscal responsibility because both are necessary.

Third, we haven't lowered the contributions to the EI system, contrary to what the Conservatives are calling for. I think that shows how responsible we are. Being fiscally responsible is important in order to make significant investments in modernizing the EI system, enhancing the Canada workers benefit and improving health care.

[English]

The Chair: MP Ste-Marie, you still have time.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you for your answer, Minister. For years, the EI fund had a surplus, which was shifted to the consolidated revenue fund. Now, however, workers and unemployed people are being penalized. We are anxiously awaiting EI reform, so we can have a system that is truly accessible.

Two years ago, Parliament passed Bill C-208 in order to stop penalizing owners for passing on their business to a family member, especially a farm. However, people still can't take advantage of those measures, so we are still waiting. Tax experts and accountants in Quebec say they have yet to receive direction from the Canada Revenue Agency, which says that it is waiting for clarification from you. We hear from business owners, families and accountants about it all the time. Is there anything you'd like to say?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Yes. Thank you for your question. You've raised a very important issue.

I hope you'll agree that, through the budget, we have improved this important measure so that family farm owners in Quebec, say, can take advantage of it. That was our goal, and we worked very hard to achieve it. Mr. Jovanovic assured me that the system would be in place by January 1, 2024. That's good news for everyone, but we need to pass the budget first so that farm owners and families in Quebec and Canada can use the important measure.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[English]

We now go to our final questioner, MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Minister, for choosing to stay a little longer. I look forward to being able to plan for longer appearances in the future.

I have a few questions I'd like to ask.

One has to do with the excise tax.

One thing the budget implementation act does, as you know, is limit the increase in the excise tax to 2%. I think there were many critics of the notion, when it was first introduced, that increases in the excise tax would be tied automatically to inflation.

I'm wondering whether this year's exception has been cause for reflection on the part of the government, in terms of the idea of maintaining an automatic escalator going forward.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: First of all, let me again commend you, Mr. Blaikie, for your peacemaking role. I say that with a smile because we're coming to the end, but, seriously, thanks a lot. I think Canadians sent us all here to work together and to be, for sure, clear about the areas where we disagree, but also, in those areas where we do agree, to actually advance the work of Canada.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Indeed.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: On the excise tax, inflation is coming down. The Bank of Canada targets inflation between 1% and 3%. Inflation has been coming down from its peak of 8.1% to 4.4%, and the CPI, which the Bank of Canada looks at, has continued to come down. The bank is forecasting inflation will be 3% in the summer and below 3% by the end of the year.

I think that will make your question purely theoretical and not relevant to the steady low-inflation reality of Canada going forward, once we get past this extraordinary pandemic economy moment—and we are getting past it. That's very good news for Canadians.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Time will tell and—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I have great confidence in the Bank of Canada.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I certainly hope those forecasts are right, but I think there will remain a philosophical question about the prudence of automatic escalators with respect to the excise tax.

I want to ask you this: There are some changes proposed for the air passenger bill of rights. This would be at least the second iteration, I think—certainly with respect to the government, although even more so with respect to bills presented by members of Parliament around air passenger rights. There has been a fair bit of criticism already of the proposed changes in this act. I know my colleague Taylor Bachrach has done some good work on this file. I think part of what's at issue is that some of the terminology in the proposed changes is vague and leaves a lot to government regulation, as opposed to legislation, in a context where folks felt the government's first shot at an air passenger bill of rights was inadequate.

I'm wondering about openness to considering changes to what's proposed in the act, specifically on the question of being a little more clear in the legislation itself regarding how this is meant to be implemented and what some of the criteria are that Canadians can expect to be laid out transparently, in terms of what their rights are.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you for the question.

All of us, in addition to our work on issues at finance committee, are also constituency MPs. Even if we're not directly responsible for transport, we are constituency MPs. As constituency MPs, every single one of us, I am sure, has many constituents who have raised passenger issues. I think this is a truth universally acknowledged in Canada. It's absolutely right for us as MPs to be focused on this and to support the rights of Canadians who travel.

Canada is a very big country. You have to fly to do your job as an MP. I have to fly to visit my family in Alberta. I could drive, but it would take a very long time. We all have to do it. I think there is a meaningful role for Parliament and the government in protecting the rights of all of us as passengers. As you mentioned, we're working on it. I think that, in the BIA, we're making meaningful improvements. That's why I referred to those measures in my opening remarks. It's a reason to get on with it. The Prime Minister likes to say, "Better is always possible". That's true too, and I'm always happy to continue the conversation.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Right on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm happy to continue, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's the time, but thank you, MP Blaikie. I should thank you for opening the door to the many extra questions.

I also thank you, Minister, for providing us with that extra time to answer many of the questions that are very important to all those Canadians watching. This impacts their lives daily, hopefully in a very positive way. We want to thank you for coming before committee, as well as all of your officials, and for informing us about the BIA.

Thank you very much.

Members, we are suspended at this time. We'll be back after question period and votes.

Thanks.

• (1335) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1550)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We're back and—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Hey, listen, MP Lawrence—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I've got my socks on, and I'm on the government side here. We're getting ready. These chairs are getting refitted for us, but could we just suspend for a few minutes? I think we might have an end to the impasse here.

The Chair: I would be happy to suspend for that reason.

• (1550) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1555)

The Chair: We're back.

When we suspended last, I was about to go to PS Beech, because he was next on our list.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all members who worked vigorously during the break and over question period. I would like to seek unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move "That the committee consider both the sub-amendment from Mr. Morantz and the amendment from Mr. Blaikie withdrawn."

And, "That the motion be amended by adding after clause (b)(ii), a new clause, which would read: iii. if the Committee has not completed the clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill by 4:30 p.m. on Monday May 29, 2023, all remaining amendments submitted to the Committee shall be deemed moved, the Chair shall put the question, forthwith and successively, without further debate on all remaining clauses and proposed amendments, as well as each and every question necessary to dispose of clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill, as well as all questions necessary to report the Bill to the House and to order the Chair to report the Bill to the House as soon as possible, and that clause (e), (f) and (g) be removed from the motion, and that the motion be adopted as amended on division, and assuming that we have unanimous consent for that, that the committee adjourn."

Just for everybody's awareness, this removes the letters that would be sent out to other committees.

The Chair: I heard a "no".

Mr. Adam Chambers: Mr. Chair, I believe there's a speaking list, right?

The Chair: There is.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I may reconsider my position, but I believe there's a speaking list, correct?

The Chair: There is. I have PS Beech on the speaking list.

Mr. Adam Chambers: I'm prepared to let the parliamentary secretary test the room perhaps a bit later.

An hon. member: Can we suspend for a few minutes?

The Chair: We'll suspend.

• (1555) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1600)

The Chair: We're back.

We did not have unanimous consent, so we are back to the sub-amendment of MP Blaikie's amendment to PS Beech's motion.

Mr. Terry Beech: Do I still have the floor?

The Chair: You do.

Mr. Terry Beech: I would seek unanimous consent to give up the floor to Adam, and then request to be given the floor back.

The Chair: Do we have agreement on that?

We do.

MP Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What we had here with the minister is what was billed to be the hottest ticket in town, so I need to thank the Prime Minister's Office for allowing the minister to come.

I understand that this committee is not functioning very well. I think Mr. Blaikie made a very wise recommendation to the minister: that when invitations come from the committee, the minister take them seriously. I can't for the life of me understand why a minister of any portfolio would blatantly ignore an invitation from the committee.

Yes, Ms. Dzerowicz is correct, in that the minister has appeared here three or four times in the last 12 months or whatever the number is. The fact is that it's been the will of the committee to invite the minister here. Yes, we can't compel the minister, and that's completely fair under our Westminster system. The only conclusion we can draw is that the minister seems to think that this committee and Parliament are an inconvenience.

If the minister is going to continue to ignore invitations from the committee, the committee won't function, and I am going to say that we will not provide UC, because as long as I'm sitting in this seat right here, I will not provide UC to move on any piece of government legislation or study or anything until it looks like there is more respect for the will of the committee.

There is enough blame to go around here to spread it from here to Orillia, but the fact of the matter is that we're sitting in this position because a minister of the Crown feels that it's an inconvenience to appear before a committee to answer questions. Now, it's one thing to get her into the room, but even when the minister appears, to not actually answer a question such as, what the government spending is on interest on the debt.... If anyone wants to look at Secretary Yellen in the U.S. and at how they run Senate committee hearings and how their secretaries actually answer questions.... If you watch that and watch what just happened here a couple of hours ago, it was shameful. If I am ever lucky enough to be in the position on the other side of the table, I hope somebody reminds me of that when I'm answering questions.

The second point is that I feel sorry for my government colleagues, because they have to defend the minister not wishing to appear in front of committee. If the member for Malpeque could not answer or refused to answer what one of the top three spending line items in P.E.I. was if he were the minister of finance, I am pretty sure he'd be out of a job. Furthermore, there are competent parliamentary secretaries all through this government who actually try to answer questions when they're asked. They should be in cabinet.

The number one thing that I hear back from constituents in terms of feedback on what happens in this place if they stumble upon any of the hearings late at night is, why does nobody answer a question? That's for everybody. That's for all parties and not just the

government: Why does everybody not answer a question? If anyone watched the committee of the whole last night and saw the Minister of Housing not even answer on what time it was, it seems like it's a game. When people wonder why we have no respect for parliamentary institutions and why the respect is going down, it's because they're being treated like a joke.

I hope that if I am ever lucky enough to be on the other side of the table I'll be reminded of this by somebody, but the fact that you have to defend a minister's right to ignore invitations from the committee, and then to be treated like "I'm gracing you with my presence"; "I'm not going to answer any questions"; and, "oh, I don't give in to bullies".... It wasn't a bully request that the committee made when we passed a motion to have the minister, along with the bank governor, come every quarter until inflation comes down in the control range.

That is the most simple explanation. I can't understand, for the life of me, why we're in a position where the committee can't work solely on the basis of a minister not wanting to come.

Now, it's possible that maybe the conspiracy theory is true—I spent too much time with some of my friends—and that it is the Prime Minister's Office that doesn't want the minister to come. She's obviously quite capable of coming. She's trusted to sit in rooms and negotiate NAFTA or CETA and to go to G7 meetings, but can't come to a parliamentary committee.

I'm a bit frustrated with the fact that it's all of a sudden our fault, on this side of the table, for the position we're in. Sure, we could negotiate better and, sure, we maybe could go along to get along a bit more, but we were the party who agreed to prestudy the bill. We didn't last year. That was out of good faith.

And then to find out that the minister will appear, but won't tell us for how long is completely unhelpful to the functioning of this committee. There won't be a government study passed from here on in without an invitation to the minister. There won't be a motion passed at this committee without an invitation to the minister. Every single motion we pass at this committee will include an invitation to the minister until it is better received and respected.

I have the deepest respect for somebody who's been put in a position. The Prime Minister obviously has given the Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister significant responsibility. She has a very tough job, but one of those responsibilities is to face questions and to be able to tell Canadians the government's story.

It's either they're ashamed of the story or they find this place an inconvenience—it can't be both. It's unbelievably frustrating, not just for me—because nobody really cares about how we feel here—but for anybody watching. To watch somebody who cannot even list two of the top three spending items.... It's not that she doesn't know—she obviously knows where we spend our money—it's that she refuses to answer a question from a Conservative.

We're not going to have a fully functioning committee until we find ourselves in a better place and we can.... We're not going to go travel on pre-budget consultations, we're not going to go travel anywhere else and we're not going to pass any government study as long as I'm sitting here and we do not have the minister respecting invitations to the committee.

We have lots of better things to do—hearing from witnesses—than to sit here and talk out the clock for 25 hours. Unfortunately, the opposition only has one tool, and it's a pretty blunt one. If we want the committee to work better, I would implore government members, not because I said it, but to take the advice of Mr. Blaikie. The minister seemed to take it, but was a little coy about whether she would accept another invitation from this committee. The only times the minister has shown up at this committee was to pass government legislation, not because the committee invited her.

This notion that the minister was unaware that we weren't able to invite her for two hours, because the committee didn't pass the motion, is complete BS. It's not possible that that's the case.

I understand that we have resources until 12 midnight tonight, but I know that we've been sitting here for a long time. If you're not going to do it for us as parliamentarians, people deserve to know that ministers can be held accountable to the committees. If the government had a majority on parliamentary committees or had won a majority in the last election, go nuts. But the truth is we've given multiple invitations to a minister of the Crown to show up, even on the supplementary estimates. I actually understand that if a minister is invited on the supplementary estimates, you can compel them to show up for them. If we don't want to create a precedent of making it contingent on going to clause-by-clause without having the minister show up, we're not actually doing a really good job of setting a precedent, because the only precedent we've been setting is that ministers can tell committees to go fly a kite.

I don't know why any minister would show up to any committee now. The precedent is set. You don't need to. You only need to show up if you want to pass legislation, and even then.... But there are plenty of other capable members who would answer questions and show up to the committee, I'm sure. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Housing Minister last night should be the housing minister, based on her ability to answer questions from all sides of the House. But that it must be some kind of game where they decide no matter what the question is, I'm not going to answer it....

If we want a better functioning committee, you don't have to run back and say that the Conservatives are making this recommendation. All we have to do is to take the recommendation and the minister has to take and listen to the recommendation by Mr. Blaikie. We'll be in the same position in the fall, next year, the next time there's a bill, BIA 2, if we're in a position where the minister is not answering invitations to committee. It's not extortion. It's not bully-

ing. It's asking the minister to respect the will of committee. The parliamentary secretary, Mr. Beech, has been reminding us that it's the majority position of the committee that passes motions. It's the majority position of the committee. It's also the majority position of the committee to invite the minister.

If the parliamentary secretary wants to test the room again on unanimous consent, I will leave the table so that I'm not here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Chambers.

I'll go back to MP Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would seek unanimous consent for the following motion, and there's been a small tweak to help out with the clerk on one of his timings. I'll read it again, and I'll add the tweak: "That the committee consider both the sub-amendment from Mr. Morantz and the amendment from Mr. Blaikie withdrawn

And, "that the motion be amended by adding after clause (b)(ii) a new section, which would read: iii. If the committee has not completed the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill by 4:30 p.m. Monday, May 29, 2023, all remaining amendments submitted to the committee shall be deemed moved, the Chair shall put the question forthwith and successively, without further debate on all remaining clauses and proposed amendments, as well as each and every question necessary to dispose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, as well as all questions necessary to report the bill to the House and to order the Chair to report the bill to the House as soon as possible; and that clause (e), (f) and (g) be removed from the motion, and that the motion be adopted as amended on division; and that under (b)(i), where it says amendments be submitted to the clerk of the committee in both official languages no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, May 19, 2023, it be changed to by noon, on Friday, May 19, 2023; and if we have unanimous consent that the committee now adjourn."

The Chair: We don't have UC.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: On a point of order, I have MP Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I may be able to get on board with Mr. Beech's motion, but I need some assurances first.

To begin with, the motion calls for clause-by-clause consideration to start on May 29. That would leave us this Thursday and the break week. Originally, we had an agreement that the various divisions of the bill would be referred to the appropriate committees, but I realize that no longer works because we are running out of time. Nevertheless, I would like us to seriously examine the bill, which packs an astronomical amount of spending into more than 500 pages.

If the Standing Committee on Finance has to carry out the review on its own, that's fine, but let's make sure we set aside a reasonable number of meetings. In order for us to support Mr. Beech's motion, we need to know that the committee is guaranteed a certain number of meetings. I think five two-hour meetings ought to do it.

I would also like us to postpone the deadline for submitting amendments, because doing our job requires that we examine the bill, listen to what witnesses have to say and take their comments into account before proposing amendments. Ideally, then, I think we should put off the May 29 start of clause by clause by a week. If that's not possible, I need assurances that we will hold five two-hour meetings with witnesses and that we will have more time to submit amendments. Currently, the proposed deadline is May 19, this Friday. I suggest we make it Friday, May 26.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ste-Marie.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, could I request a three-minute suspension so that I can make a phone call?

The Chair: Okay. We will suspend.

• (1615)

(Pause)

• (1620)

The Chair: Everyone, we are back.

Was it MP Ste-Marie or PS Beech?

It's PS Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: In addition to my previous UC motion, which included the entirety of the motion plus the change for the clerk, to go from 4 p.m. to 12 p.m., we would like to add, "(e) and that the whips of recognized parties, and the clerks, be empowered to seek as many meetings as possible, with the goal of meeting for 10 hours before the end of this week".

The Chair: Okay. Everybody has heard that.

MP Ste-Marie, is that a yes? Yes, okay.

PS Beech, you're asking for UC. Is that right?

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm asking for UC. If we get UC, we would then adjourn.

The Chair: Okay.

Do we have UC, members?

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Okay, let's take that. We have UC.

We're adjourned.

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