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(HANSARD)

Friday, February 26, 2016

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 26, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)
[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from February 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak today on Bill C-4 and to ask my fellow members' support.

Bill C-4 would repeal two bills that have changed the labour relations landscape in Canada, and not for the better. We have said from the start that we believe in doing different things and in doing things differently. Supporting the middle class and those working hard to support it is a key priority of our government. Labour relations, positive and otherwise, have a direct and immediate effect on workers and employers.

Bill C-4 would restore a fair and balanced approach to labour relations in the country, an approach that would allow workers to make free and informed decisions. It is supported by both employers and labour, and it fosters stability. These are fundamental Canadian values that should be reflected in how we support Canadian workers. It is an approach that we can be proud of, unlike the previous Conservative government's "my way or the highway" attitude.

We know we are in trouble when we hear what respected labour leaders, like the president of the Canadian Labour Congress, have to say about Bill C-525 and C-377. He said that the bills "...were nothing more than an attempt to undermine unions' ability to do important work like protecting jobs, promoting health and safety in the workplace, and advocating on behalf of all Canadian workers."

The northern Ontario area manager of the carpenters' union said, "Our membership and staff are incredibly happy to hear the Federal Government has followed through with its campaign promise to repeal these [two bills]. The introduction of these Bills were self-

serving and posed no benefits to our members who rely on [protecting the rights of the union workers]."

A third quote is from the Canadian union of operating engineers. It said, "One of the biggest key points to repeal Bill C-377 and C-525 is for our members privacy [...] We are a small union [representing] 14,000 members. The additional...cost associated [with making] these changes [with the] new rules will run in and around 3 million dollars, an expense [that this union] cannot afford. We agree with the government and believe these Bills [should] be repealed."

Simply put, these bills have undermined labour unions and labour relations in the country. Bill C-377 creates unnecessary red tape for unions and could put unions at a disadvantage during collective bargaining. Bill C-525 makes it difficult for employees to unionize and easier for bargaining agents to be certified. Therefore, they trust the government's plan to ensure Canada's labour laws best serve employees and employers.

As a past union member myself, I understand how unions strengthen communities. They help to create a safer workplace, better working conditions, and help recognize the need for workplace health and safety committees.

I look forward to meeting every organized labour union in my riding of Nickel Belt and greater Sudbury, to hear, listen, and understand their issues. I recognize the important role that unions play in protecting the rights of Canadian workers and helping the middle class.

Unions play an important economic role and encourage companies to grow and prosper. They trust that unions can establish productive relationships between employees and employers. Therefore, we should trust the union movement in a fair and balanced way.

While unions are required to share a great deal of information about their operations, employers are not. An organization that does not follow the rules would be fined \$1,000 a day, and up to \$25,000. Why would a requirement like this be imposed on a labour organization and no one else? These bills single out and attack labour in Canada for no fair reason.

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[Translation]

These measures discriminate against unions. Bill C-525 is a disaster. It replaced the card check system with mandatory voting. Unions are no longer certified automatically when a majority of workers sign membership cards. That complicates things for workers who want to unionize. Not only is it now more difficult for unions to obtain certification as bargaining agents, but it is also easier for them to lose their certification.

Who could possibly benefit from the new system? It sure looks like everyone loses. It was up to us to turn the ship around. We are acting in everyone's interest. We want to help the middle class, not hurt it. We believe that for labour policy reform to happen, there must be meaningful dialogue among unions, employers, stakeholders, the provinces and territories, and the Canadian public. We are walking the talk.

Repealing Bills C-377 and C-525 is the right decision. It is an informed decision that will restore fairness and balance to the world of work.

These two bills are nothing but solutions to problems that do not even exist. That is why I encourage all members of the House to support Bill C-4, which is in the best interest of all Canadians.

● (1010)

[English]

I ask members to think about what labour unions do for Canadians, and to think about the working Canadians who are trying to make a living and raise their family. Are decent wages and safe working environments something that members think Canadians can live without? Are positive labour relations between employers and employees important?

I ask members to think about the rights of workers to be represented and protected. I ask that members do the right thing and repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, and restore a fair and balanced approach to labour relations in Canada.

I am proud to be part of the Liberal government that will repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. I recognize the important role that unions play in protecting the rights of Canadian workers and helping the middle class grow and prosper.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a two-part question.

Our provincial counterparts, British Columbia and many others, have a system wherein there is a right to a secret ballot. Does the member believe that they are wrong and they need to repeal the legislation because after all these years it has been terribly unfair to the system? That is part A.

Part B is this. Does the member feel it is fair to go back to a system where, for example, in a workplace of 20 people, 11 people sign the card for automatic certification and there are nine people who might not know what is happening? Can the member say that is fair to the workers?

I would like to hear the answer, both with respect to the provinces and the individuals.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, we have heard, and I have heard, from many unions across the country, and in my riding. Many of their members look at these laws, Bill C-525 and Bill C-377, as very different from some of the other provincial legislation that is in place. We have to repeal these bills to restore fairness and balance in the labour movement.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the NDP support this bill. It is a good first step. However, as the member mentioned in his speech, more needs to be done to protect hard-working Canadians in their workplaces. I would ask him to expand on his comments about health and safety concerns and when the government will enhance these provisions for our public sector employees.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, health and safety committees have been in place across the country and in my riding, especially in the mining industry, and a lot of the natural resource industries, for decades now.

They have been established because of the labour movements, because of the unions protecting the workers in the workforce. It is very important, and we have to look at strengthening the laws. I agree with that. It is something that the government will look at and bring forward.

● (1015)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his interesting speech, which he delivered in both official languages, so I especially appreciated that.

How can we, as MPs who were all elected by secret ballot, oppose voting by secret ballot? That is a mystery to me.

I would remind the House that our legislation requires that secret ballot voting be used in very specific situations, including establishing or dissolving a union. That is part of the democratic process. In fact, nothing is more democratic than voting by secret ballot. It could lend even greater legitimacy to the creation of a union.

I ask, then, how can a member who was elected by secret ballot oppose the principle of secret ballots?

[English]

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, once again, here is an example of the Conservative Party twisting the reality to benefit its ideological view. This is not shared by the Canadian public.

Labour has long been supporting workers across the country, and honourable members know that. I can mention other associations, like the police association, the firefighters, the teachers union, bricklayers, and other unions, that are supporting the repeal of the acts.

The Conservatives not only brought in this legislation, they also focused on the workers in the federal government. The workers within the federal government are precious assets. We need to protect them. We need to look at this. The Conservatives are opposed because of some of the changes that have been made.

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Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reference the question to my colleague from Nickel Belt by the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, in which she wanted a provincial example. The province of Newfoundland has gone from the secret ballot to the card check. All of the testimony throughout those hearings indicated that the card check was the best way. It is a system that has served this country well. However, it was imposed in this last government.

We know that constitutional experts said it was unconstitutional. Privacy experts said it breached the privacy of millions of Canadians, and the wife of the Speaker spoke against it. I will just throw that out.

Does my colleague agree that they were both ridiculous pieces of no good, uncalled for legislation, which we are repealing with Bill C-4?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, there is a convention in place of respecting the Speaker's neutrality, and the implication by the member that the Speaker would have a bias on this particular issue is totally inappropriate. I think it should be withdrawn.

The Speaker: I am not sure that the point of order is one where I can require the member to withdraw the comment. However, I do wish to say that I appreciate the intervention and the help of the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, and I think he has a point.

The member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, when we spoke with many of the labour movements, the unions, repealing the acts is the right thing to do to restore fairness and balance in the workplace.

I am proud to be part of the Liberal government that is taking action immediately to repeal these two acts.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that some accommodations were made with the other side to allow me to speak at this time, and I very much appreciate that.

I rise today to speak about Bill C-4, which would make very substantial changes to our labour relations environment.

For the purposes of my speech today, I will focus on one specific element of the bill, the secret ballot.

I believe in the importance of a secret ballot. On first blush, it would perhaps seem odd that, here we are in 2016, in the Canadian House of Commons with our long history of respecting freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and democracy, and yet it is necessary in 2016 to make arguments about the importance of a secret ballot. Frankly, we thought the argument on structural deficits had been won in the 1990s, and we thought the argument for the secret ballot had been won in the 19th century, yet the current government's actions force us to again make arguments, which to many perhaps seem rather obvious, about how essential it is to allow people to vote in private without someone else's scrutiny.

It is 2016, but I will say, unlike our current Prime Minister, I have more to say in favour of social improvement than simply stating the current date.

I would like to give some background about the certification process, and then make some substantive arguments about the importance of a secret ballot.

We have different systems for union certification, and the context we are talking about today, of course, is the secret ballot for union certification. We favour a secret ballot. We favour the idea that people should be able to express their political views in privacy, without scrutiny from other people. We think that is a good general principle of democracy.

However, in this particular case at least, the government and our colleagues in the NDP think differently. They favour a card check system, which involves a certification process where people are asked to sign on in a sort of semi-public way. Someone would ask a person to sign on, those cards would be collected, and then certification would happen automatically based on that card check process. In my view, this very much resembles the sort of 19th century public balloting system and has many of the same problems.

What are the substantive reasons of why a secret ballot is important?

I will start by talking about the right to privacy. People should have their right to privacy respected in matters of political opinion, and one might say in the matter of religious opinion as well, and on these deeply important, and for some people, personal matters. People should have the right to not have to express their opinions in public.

Of course, many people choose to talk publicly about their political perspective. Nobody has any doubt how I voted in the last election. However, just because some people wish to be public, it does not mean that others who wish to be more private should not in fact have the right to do so. We understand and respect the right to privacy in these cases. Without that privacy respected, many people would not have the ability to vote and be confident that there would not be some discomfort to them or some negative consequence.

I was recently in India talking about some human rights issues there. One of the issues in India is that a number of states have laws that require people who want to change their religion to declare so publicly, and then have the state review the process by which they came to that decision. In India, many have concerns about this precisely because of the fact that one should be able to keep those deeply held opinions private.

The argument was made in response that if people are confident in their own perspectives, why should they not be willing to declare them publicly? However, we obviously understand that on these sensitive matters, and that includes opinions about unions and union certification, people should have the right to have the privacy of their opinions respected, and a secret ballot effectively ensures that.

The second argument I will make in defence of the secret ballot is that secret ballots protect people from reprisals and help to avoid corruption. Here I think it is important to visit some of the history around how the secret ballot originally developed.

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In 1867 in the U.K., the second reform act was passed, called “The Representation of the People Act”. This enfranchised a greater number of skilled workers.

• (1020)

This made the need for a secret ballot particularly urgent. There was a concern that tradespeople would be subject to undue and inappropriate pressure by their employers in the case of a public ballot. If, as the traditional public ballot system was, people had to go to the town square and declare who they were supporting in an election, skilled workers working for other people in trades and other areas might be subject to significant pressure from employers. This added to the concern as well that the tenant class, people who were working other people's land, might be the subject of eviction or threats of eviction if they voted against the interests of those who owned the land on which they lived.

The public ballot was a way of forcing people to not be able to exercise their political franchise in a way that was consistent with their interests because they were subject to threats of economic coercion and other forms of intimidation.

What is important about this history is that bringing in the secret ballot was an essential reform to protect the rights of working people, to protect the rights of lower-income people in the U.K. at the time of the second reform act. Yet perversely, we have political parties in the House today who claim to advocate for those working men and women, who do not understand how important the secret ballot was and continues to be for protecting their ability to express their opinion.

There was real fear of reprisals at the time. That has echoes in our debate today about the fear that people who are forced to vote in a public ballot may be subject to undue pressure and intimidation. That pressure could come from either side. In particular though, in a card check system that intimidation and undue pressure could come from those who are seeking to sign people up. Regardless of people's opinion on certification in a particular case, working men and women should be free to come to their own conclusions and to express their opinions privately without fear of reprisal.

Another issue at the time the secret ballot was introduced was concern about corruption. If people are voting publicly, it is much easier to offer inappropriate inducements to buy votes when one can actually check to see if they voted as they were paid to do so. The secret ballot, although it does not fully eliminate corruption, helps to ensure that sort of thing does not happen, because there is no way to effectively see if the vote that was bought was actually paid.

Protection against reprisals and corruption were important for bringing in secret ballots and they are important today for ensuring that secret ballots continue to exist in all environments.

The third point I will make in defence of the secret ballot is the importance of a vote being preceded by a process of deliberation in which people can hear arguments from both sides. Both sides should have an opportunity to present arguments in favour or against a particular proposition, in this case certification, before the date on which a vote takes place.

The card check system does not allow that deliberation to happen. The card check system means that the certification process could

have gone all the way through in terms of getting all of those signatures before people who have a different opinion are even aware that that process is happening. It undermines the principle that there should be meaningful discussion and debate on both sides. The government seems to understand this principle on some issues, although imperfectly.

We disagree with the government's reluctance to have a referendum when it comes to electoral reform. We hear it make the argument that before any kind of hypothetical vote takes place it is important for there to be a long discussion about the different options and the pros and cons. Why does the government not believe that in the case of certification? Surely, the secret ballot at a specific time provides an opportunity for robust debate within a group of workers about whether or not certification in general, and whether or not certification with a particular union, is a good idea.

Many people might be surprised watching this debate today that it is necessary to make arguments in the House in favour of a secret ballot, that two of the three major parties in the House oppose giving working men and women a secret ballot on something as essential as union certification. We need to make those arguments. The government and the NDP just do not seem to understand how truly foundational, how important this is, how consistent this is with a right to privacy, how a secret ballot protects against reprisals and corruption, and how a secret ballot helps ensure that a vote is preceded by a process of meaningful deliberation.

• (1025)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, what the Conservatives have failed to understand is the importance of labour and management in relationships and harmony within the workforce, and how much healthier it is when government works with organized labour and business to ensure harmony. The member needs to recognize that the legislation that we are debating today is to rectify a wrong when the government brought in two private members' bills without going through a process that allowed for that harmony to continue. There are many individuals and groups who really believe in the value of organized labour and how it has contributed so much to Canadian society over the years and it does have a fabulous role to play into the future.

Why does the member feel that the Conservative Party tends to want to use labour legislation as a wedge issue, as opposed to recognizing the true value of having harmony within our workforce?

• (1030)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, it is evident when we have this discussion about these issues that the Liberals want to speak in broad strokes about harmony, about the value of organized labour. These are things that we agree with on this side of the House. We agree with the importance of harmony. We believe that organized labour has value.

However, the member did not address, and most of the speeches I have heard from the side opposite do not address, the specific provisions in the bill. Yes, it is all well and good to talk about these nice words, like “harmony” and “working together”, but let us talk about what is actually in the bill. This bill would take away the assurance of a secret ballot. It would take away the assurance that working men and women could vote in the privacy of a secret ballot and not be subject to undue pressure that is associated with a public ballot. Instead of just relying on nice words, I wish the members would actually look at the substance of the bill and consider the arguments that have been made.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for a very eloquent speech and a very interesting history lesson. It is great to have a fellow alumnus of the Canadian University Society for Intercollegiate Debate in this House.

I would ask the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, given his enthusiasm for secret ballots, whether he would support a system whereby we have votes in every Canadian workplace periodically on whether the employees want a union. It seems that the Conservatives' supposed concern for workplace democracy only starts after employees have indicated by signing membership cards that they want a union.

The member suggested that this period between signing cards and the vote is a good opportunity for debate and deliberation. However, would he not acknowledge the fact that whereas unions have essentially no access to the employees they are trying to organize, the employer has continual access to those employees during work hours and the employer has authority over those workers, and that this creates a massive imbalance during this period of hoped-for deliberation?

M. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member, who is indeed an alumnus of the Canadian University Society for Intercollegiate Debate along with me. I understand the Prime Minister was part of that society at one time as well, but he dropped out after the society could no longer afford his speaking fees.

I want to respond to the member's question in terms of a potential imbalance. Of course, employers have regular access to employees, and employees have regular access to one another. Both of these are different dynamics in a certification discussion. That is why we think, though, that a secret ballot makes sense. One could imagine pressure exerted by an employer. One could imagine cases in which pressure is exerted by fellow employees as well. We could imagine cases where an employee is reluctant to express opposition to a union because if certification happened anyway, then in some sense his or her situation would be significantly affected by the union. I say, why not a secret ballot?

The member talked about having regular secret ballots. We would have to agree that it would be relatively impractical if the state were to say that we have to have votes on certification on a regular basis in every workplace even if there had not been any kind of expression of interest. Let workers express interest, and then let us have a secret ballot in cases where they have interest. That seems like the most reasonable, practical way to proceed.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we resume debate on Bill C-4 today, it is important to remember why

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unions matter. Unions provide better pay, pensions, and benefits. Unions provide healthier and safer workplaces.

Some would argue that, while unions might have been necessary in a Dickensian era, workers are now already protected by good regulations; but the reality in many workplaces is that labour and safety regulations are only really applied if a union is present to call attention to those issues. Unions give employees a voice in their workplaces, and that feedback is often very useful to management and, indeed, can help to improve productivity. Countries with higher rates of unionization enjoy better living standards, greater equality, and more stable economies.

I believe that the House should maintain an industrial relations regime that facilitates employees forming unions and bargaining collectively. Unfortunately, the former Conservative government did the opposite. Bill C-525 made it harder to form unions and easier to decertify them. The Conservatives would say that this bill is all about allowing workers to vote on their union status, but the Conservatives have not implemented a system that would allow elections in all workplaces across the country to determine whether employees want a union.

The Conservatives' supposed interest in workplace democracy only kicks in after workers have indicated that they want to join a union by signing membership cards. Bill C-525 essentially places another hurdle in the way of employees seeking to join a union, and this delay is not simply a matter of inconvenience. In far too many cases, it has provided an opportunity for employers to intimidate their employees and prevent unionization.

Moving on to Bill C-377, this legislation imposes onerous administrative requirements on unions. The Conservatives would have us believe that it is all about transparency. I think everyone in the House believes that unions should and do provide financial statements to their members. That happened for decades before this legislation was enacted, and it will continue to happen after it is repealed.

However, Bill C-377 went far beyond financial statements. It required unions to disclose and account for each individual transaction over \$5,000. If the House ever applied that type of transparency to a business, the Conservatives would be screaming about red tape and compliance costs. Indeed, Bill C-377 would cost millions of dollars for the Canada Revenue Agency to administer.

One of the more clever arguments that the Conservatives made in this debate was that international unions operating in Canada are already subject to such requirements through the U.S. Department of Labor. Before the people of Regina—Lewvan elected me, I worked as an economist for the United Steelworkers union, and I can tell the House that Bill C-377 does not align with the American disclosure requirements and, in fact, goes far beyond them.

I am very happy to vote in favour of Bill C-4, but simply repealing the most egregious Conservative attacks on working people is not enough. Much more is going to be needed to improve the situation of working Canadians.

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Often in this debate, the Liberals have spoken about the need for balance in industrial relations. One aspect of that balance is that in the rare cases where the collective bargaining process breaks down, both sides bear an economic cost. In a strike or a lockout, the employer must make do without the workers' labour and the workers must make do without their wages. Therefore, there is pressure on both sides to come to a resolution. However, if the employer can simply bring in replacement workers, that destroys this balance.

●(1035)

I am very pleased that my colleague from Jonquière has introduced a private member's bill to restore balance in this situation. In recent minority Parliaments, the Liberals spoke very positively about anti-scab legislation, but they never quite produced enough votes to actually pass it.

Now, the Liberals have a majority. They have the ability to pass whatever legislation they want, and how the Liberals vote on anti-scab legislation will be a crucial test of whether the government plans to live up its rhetoric about respecting workers' rights and strengthening the middle class.

Many other important workplace issues go beyond industrial relations. In the election, the Liberals promised to improve the Canada pension plan. It took three ghosts to convince Ebenezer Scrooge. When the Minister of Finance met with the provinces before Christmas, it took only two ghosts, Christy Clark and Brad Wall, to steer him away from improving the Canada pension plan.

As a proud Saskatchewanian, I found it rather strange that our premier used the downturn in commodities to argue against improving the Canada pension plan, rather than be in favour of improving employment insurance that actually would have helped the affected workers.

Despite all the Conservative rhetoric we have heard in this House about the need to respect the oil and gas sector, I think it is telling that Conservative MPs will not stand up and support better access to employment insurance for laid-off energy workers.

I am proud of the fact that the NDP is pushing for better employment insurance. In the election, the Liberals also talked about better employment insurance, but yesterday they were up speaking against our opposition day motion to achieve exactly that.

The specific Liberal objection was to a national entrance requirement of 360 hours. I would just remind the House that when the Liberals were on this side of the House, they were demanding precisely that policy. Now the Liberals are saying that regional differences in labour markets need to be respected.

Certainly those regional differences exist, but if someone is laid off in a region of high unemployment or low unemployment, they are still out of a job and they still need income support.

What the Liberals have not explained is why the entrance requirement is the aspect of employment insurance that should vary in response to regional differences. It is still the case that the duration of EI benefits varies according to the regional unemployment rate, and there is a logic that it probably takes longer to find a job in an area with a higher unemployment rate. The NDP motion would

allow the duration of EI benefits to continue to vary according to regional differences.

There are also problems and lags in measuring regional unemployment. Regina is near the epicentre of the downturn in the oil and gas sector, yet the measured unemployment rate in my community is still low enough that the entrance requirement for EI remains at the national maximum of 700 hours.

Imagine individuals working part time for 25 hours a week, and imagine that they work for half the year. Well, 25 hours a week times 26 weeks is 650 hours, which is not enough to qualify for employment insurance. Individuals in Regina could pay into EI for half a year, and then when they are laid off, receive no benefit whatsoever. That is unfair, and that is why we need a national entrance requirement of 360 hours.

The NDP will vote for Bill C-4, but working Canadians also need the Liberals to vote for our opposition day motion to improve employment insurance, to vote for the private member's bill to enact anti-scab legislation, and to keep their promise to improve the Canada pension plan.

●(1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his informative speech.

The key to developing our organizations is co-operation and partnership between unions and employers. How will this new bill ensure fairer and more balanced protections for employer-union relations?

[*English*]

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly which motion or bill I might have been asked about, because I tried to address several in my speech. However, we are debating Bill C-4, so I assume the question is about that legislation. It really would improve collaboration by doing away with the most egregious Conservative attacks on working people and on unions, but it is clearly not enough.

As I said in my speech, if we really want to have balance in the workplace, it is important that the employer not be allowed to simply bring in replacement workers when there is a legitimate strike or lockout under way. Therefore, we also need to pass anti-scab legislation. I am very proud that it has come forward as a private member's bill.

I agree with my colleague across the way that Bill C-4 is a good start, but much more is required to really achieve justice for working people in this country.

●(1045)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not all union members in Canada want their union dues spent to support a political party that they do not support. They want the protection of a secret ballot.

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I am interested to hear the member explain how replacing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 with Bill C-4 would do anything to protect the workers' rights.

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, the member for Sarnia—Lambton talks about union members possibly not wanting their dues spent to support political parties. I have good news for the member, which is that neither corporate nor union contributions are allowed to federal political parties. I certainly support that change to our democracy.

What the member for Sarnia—Lambton might be getting at is that, in some provinces at the provincial level, corporate and union donations to political parties are allowed. I think the solution to that is for provincial governments to follow the fine federal example and ban both corporate and union donations.

However, if we are in a jurisdiction where those sorts of contributions are allowed, then the important thing is to just have a democratic process within the union to determine how funds are spent and whether and how they are contributed. That is the appropriate way for workers to be able to defend their interests in the democratic process.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will refresh the memory of the member for Regina—Lewvan. Three times during the federal election we saw union members line up behind the leader of the Liberal Party for selfies. Many of them were paid—

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Drummond.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I think there may be a problem with the French interpretation. Could someone check on that?

The Speaker: I think it is working now.

The hon. member for Saskatoon—Grasswood.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan that the House has been notified that, three times during the election, the Liberal Party had union members line up behind the Liberal leader; not once, not twice, but three times, all for \$100, to get a selfie with the leader of the Liberal Party. What does the member say about that? We would like to hear the member's comments about union members being used for political operations as we just saw in the federal election.

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, obviously it would be inappropriate for a union to contribute money to a political party or to pay staff to work on a federal political campaign. If that happened in the last election, certainly it would need to be investigated, and enforcement action would need to be taken.

Having said that, union members obviously need to be free, like other citizens, to participate in the democratic process. I suspect that some of those union members who were taking selfies behind the Prime Minister might soon be regretting that decision when they discover that the Liberals are not moving to implement a federal minimum wage, may not vote in anti-scab legislation, and may be voting against the NDP motion to improve employment insurance. I suspect next time they will be taking selfies behind NDP candidates.

● (1050)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first time to give a speech in the House, I would like to begin by thanking my wife and children for being a solid support behind me. I would also like to thank my campaign team, specifically, my parents and my siblings, who put in countless hours on my campaign, my best friend Dennis, who set up way too many signs and put about 6,000 kilometres on his pickup truck, driving around the vast riding of Peace River—Westlock, and my campaign manager John for helping me win this seat. It was a spirited campaign and I appreciate their help.

I stand today to address the issue of union transparency and employee voting rights. If left as it is, Bill C-4 would repeal two pieces of legislation that workers across Canada fought hard to achieve. Unions, employers and, most important, the employees have all expressed their belief that the certification and decertification of unions should be determined in a free and democratic manner. Our country was founded on this same principle, that those who are governed have the right to make their choice by secret ballot, a method that removes fear and ensures that workers are free from the threat of intimidation by both employers and unions.

The Liberal Party wants to reverse this. It is wilfully ignoring workers across Canada who have stated that they want the right to vote in secret. All of us in the House represent a group of constituents. We are here by their consent and by their vote, which was cast free of harassment and according to their conscience. How can the Liberal Party not allow workers across Canada this same right?

Before the Employees' Voting Rights Act came into force, union certification was heavily weighted in favour of unions. A trade union was automatically certified if a majority of the employees simply signed a membership card. This process lent itself to manipulation and abuse. Without a secret voting system in place, both employers and unions held a position of power over the employee.

The Employees' Voting Rights Act changed that. It put unions and workers on a level playing field. Union certification is now done according to the free and secret votes of a majority. Employees make their decisions through the privacy of a secret ballot and are less subject to intimidation.

Prior to the act, a 35% threshold was needed to create a union in a federal jurisdiction. Interestingly enough, a 50% threshold was needed to decertify a union. Under the Employees' Voting Rights Act, a 40% threshold was set to trigger a vote either way. The act successfully put equal weight on both the certification and decertification process, giving workers the right to determine whether their workplace should be unionized.

Statements by Members

If the Liberal Party repeals this act, it will strip a democratic right away from our nation's workers. Clearly, the Liberals believe union demands take precedence over the rights of workers.

To expand on this topic, I have a number of concerns.

Many members of the House will agree that, historically around the world, positions of power can give rise to the abuse of power. Without checks and balances, the rights of workers are, without exception, open to abuse. This is the reason why democratic governments worldwide have legislation in place governing the certification of unions.

Preventing abuse of power is not a new concept. At the federal level, the United States uses secret ballot voting to determine union certification. The unions use secret ballot voting as a means of electing their union leaders. Polls among union and formerly unionized employees have consistently shown 83% to 89% support for secret ballot voting. This system is a widely accepted method of determining certification.

Why does the Liberal government want to repeal a law that keeps Canadian workers free from pressure, manipulation or intimidation from unions or employers?

It is interesting to note that five provinces already use secret ballots to determine certification. If the Liberal government repeals the Employees' Voting Rights Act, federally regulated workers will once again have fewer democratic rights than their provincial counterparts. Who wins in this scenario? Before the Employees' Voting Rights Act existed, union organizers and management held an unfair advantage over Canadian workers. If this law is repealed, it is the Canadian worker who loses. Any time a democratic right is repealed, our nation as a whole loses.

•(1055)

Bill C-4 poses another problem. It seeks to repeal a requirement for labour organizations to be financially transparent. Financial transparency is the bedrock of financial accountability. Why does the Liberal government seek to undermine worker and taxpayer rights to financial accountable unions? There is a public interest in this. Union fees reduce taxes and therefore affect all Canadians.

Union workers pay union dues, yet without this legislation in place, unions are not obligated to tell workers where and how this money was spent. Before and during the federal election, unions spent millions of dollars to fight the Conservative Party. Taking away financial transparency is nothing more than a Liberal measure to thank unions.

Again, who is the biggest loser if this law is repealed? The worker, the taxpayer, and our country. We are a nation that demands financial accountability of our federal, provincial and municipal governments, and our charities. Unions enjoy a wide range of tax benefits, and this special treatment impacts all Canadians.

I am sure each member of the House would stand by and proclaim the belief in the principles of transparency, accountability, and democracy. Yet, with the bill, the Liberal Party would do the exact opposite.

Let me be clear. This law does not regulate the activities of unions. Nor does it mandate how it spends their money. It does not violate any of the rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What it does do is ask for limited disclosure of salary, benefits, and paid time spent on political activities. In short, it is the voice of the workers asking how the union is spending their money.

Financial transparency legislation for unions is not new. The United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and France all have this legislation in place. The Canadian labour organizations headquartered in the United States must already disclose financial information to the American government. Transparency is a deterrent. It is a means to keep abuse in check. It is a way to protect against corruption. Quite frankly, the fact that some unions and the Liberal Party wish to repeal this law leads me to question why. What are they hiding?

It may be in the interest of the House to know that in the United States, similar legislation led to more than 900 criminal convictions for inappropriate and fraudulent activity.

Unions in Canada receive public benefits. The taxpayers have a right to know how their money is spent. Union members have a right to know how their union dues are spent, and whether they are spent wisely and effectively. Currently this is the case. If Bill C-4 goes through as it is, Canadian workers and taxpayers will suddenly be left in the dark. Financial transparency is a good public policy. Secret ballot voting is a democratic right.

Bill C-4 is flawed. It seeks to repeal what Canadian workers and taxpayers have fought to put in place. Members of the House should remember that these same workers and taxpayers are the ones who chose them to represent them in the House.

I ask members to vote against the bill. When the rights are stripped away from Canadian workers, we all lose.

The Speaker: The member will have five minutes for questions and comments when debate resumes.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, the Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec, a public and parapublic service union, launched a website promoting a single tax return in Quebec.

As tax season approaches, the federal government might want to think about whether it is really necessary to maintain the status quo. Using a single tax return would result in savings of half a billion dollars a year. This approach is already being used for collecting consumption taxes in Quebec.

What good does it do Quebecers to have to fill out two returns, finance two bureaucracies, and fight with two difficult tax systems? It does not do them any good.

Levying taxes is one of the most important powers a country has, and this could be the first step toward Quebec's independence.

* * *

[English]

CANADA–PHILIPPINES RELATIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to recognize the very special relationship between Canada and the Philippines.

For many years now the Philippines has been the number one source of immigration to the province of Manitoba. The impact nationwide has been very profound. Over the last number of years, we have seen a large number of immigrants coming from the Philippines, not only as immigrants but also as workers. Many come on an annual basis to visit, to attend our schools, and so forth.

It is encouraging that since the election, the Prime Minister has visited the Philippines, as have the minister of free trade, and others visit.

I want to highlight the importance of two great nations having a special relationship. As we move forward into the future, we hope to see more bridging of our two nations, sharing and embellishing a very rich Filipino heritage, which is quickly becoming a part of Canadian heritage itself.

* * *

• (1100)

[Translation]

V. BOUTIN DE L'ÉRABLE PEE WEE HOCKEY TEAM

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finals of the Quebec City international pee wee hockey tournament, the largest amateur tournament in the world, were held last Sunday. In the international C division, the V. Boutin de l'Érable pee wee team from my riding was victorious.

Starting last September, these 17 young men and their coaches put their time, their effort, and above all their heart into earning a spot in this prestigious tournament. Their determination led them to the top of the podium.

These hockey players won 42 of their 45 games, making this an exceptional season in all respects. These boys have inspired all sports fans in our region. As the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, and on behalf of all my colleagues in the House, I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to every member of the team, the players, the coaches, and the parents, for this wonderful achievement. Everyone in the riding is very proud of your victory.

Congratulations, boys.

* * *

BUSINESS NETWORKS

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that our country's economic success depends on industrial

Statements by Members

innovation. It is therefore essential to support emerging businesses by providing them with a leading-edge platform to properly prepare them.

I had the privilege of attending the 2015 edition of the Cuvée entrepreneuriale to honour new businesses in the Haut-Richelieu area, most of which benefited from incubator services offered by the Centre d'aide aux entreprises Haute-Montérégie.

Industrialized countries have already recognized incubator and accelerator organizations as the ideal transition between school and business. They provide a workplace, a credible image, technical support, research assistance, ongoing networking opportunities, and structured mentoring.

I believe that business networks are key to the success of the fourth industrial revolution in Canada and that we need to invest—

The Speaker: Order please. The hon. member for Drummond.

* * *

COMMUNITY PEDIATRIC CENTRE IN DRUMMONDVILLE

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today in the House to mark the first anniversary of a social pediatric centre called Les petits bonheurs de Drummondville.

The people of the greater Drummond area can be proud of this centre, inspired by the Dr. Julien model. It does good work and has been wonderfully successful. The Drummondville community came together to help bring this initiative to the Saint-Joseph neighbourhood.

This centre's team works with vulnerable children aged zero to 14 and focuses on the development, needs, and rights of these children. Their work with these children is founded on the values of social integration and social justice. This centre greatly enhances the lives of many families.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the entire team at the social pediatric centre for their excellent work, in particular Luis Bérubé, the executive director, and Annie Clair, the president.

Congratulations on being involved in the greater Drummond area community.

* * *

[English]

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the work of a member of Parliament brings one into contact with some extraordinary people. My constituents Brian Philcox and Bonnie Buxton, co-founders of the organization FASWorld, are two such people.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder is incurable and the leading cause of preventable developmental disability in Canada.

Statements by Members

Nearly 20 years ago Brian and Bonnie discovered that their adopted daughter suffered from FASD. Since then, they have worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy. In 1999, they organized the first annual FASD Awareness Day. September 9 is now recognized as FASDay in 42 countries around the world.

In December, Bonnie and Brian were awarded the Meritorious Service Medal by the Governor General of Canada.

I would like to extend my congratulations to Bonnie and Brian. It is an honour to represent them here in the House of Commons and to count them as friends.

* * *

● (1105)

DUNBARTON HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as many in the House are aware, there was a terrible incident on Tuesday at Dunbarton High School in Pickering.

I would like to recognize a resident of my riding, Lindsay-native James Blair, for taking action along with his fellow educators to help end the incident. Mr. Blair is a teacher at Dunbarton and was one of the many heroic staff members who sprang into action when an armed assailant, later determined to be a student suffering from mental stress, elected to injure six students. It is clear that this incident could have been much worse if it were not for the efforts of not only Mr. Blair, but his co-workers and the first responders too.

This is an example of some of the fine people responsible for educating our children, and I for one would like to thank all of our educators for continually going above and beyond not only for the safety and well-being of their students in the face of crisis, but also for ensuring that our youth are prepared for the challenges ahead.

On behalf of the House I would like to thank Mr. Blair, the staff, and management at Dunbarton, and the first responders for their efforts.

It is also my hope that the students, trying to come to terms with what happened, are able to get the help and support they need.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the final week of Black History Month to recognize the contributions of the Hon. Jean Augustine and Mr. Garnett Manning. I had the privilege of meeting both of these remarkable Canadians this month.

The Hon. Jean Augustine was both the first black school principal in our country and the first black woman to serve in the House. Twenty years ago, her bill proclaiming February as Black History Month was passed with unanimous support. I am proud to announce that a new secondary school named in her honour will open its doors this September in my home riding of Brampton West.

Mr. Manning was the second black man elected to the Brampton City Council. Mr. Manning has motivated and changed the lives of many black Canadian youth through his service.

Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate the achievements, the contributions, and the hardships of black Canadians, I am honoured to acknowledge the work of both of these remarkable Canadians.

* * *

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR FUNDRAISER

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about a very special event that took place in my riding.

On Saturday, February 20, I had the great honour to participate in the Coldest Night of the Year Walk with a wonderful group in Mississauga. The purpose of the walk is to raise money for the hungry, homeless, and hurting in over 100 communities across Canada.

The walk in Mississauga was organized by a wonderful staple in my riding, an organization called The Dam. The Dam is a safe community hub that builds relationships to develop, assist, and mentor youth and young moms along the journey toward reaching their full potential.

The Coldest Night of the Year walk in Mississauga consisted of 200 walkers and raised over \$41,000. Across the country, the walk raised over \$3.8 million for 92 charities.

I am so proud to have taken part in this fantastic walk for such a great cause.

I ask that all members of the House join me in commending the fantastic work done by The Dam and the exciting outcome of the Coldest Night of the Year walk.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the utmost respect for the Minister of National Defence as a veteran.

However, no one understands what the Liberals are doing. Only the Liberals understand each other. This week, I asked the minister whether Canada was at war. He said, "I do not fully understand the member's question."

Then he had to say whether this was a combat mission or not. To that, he said, "this is a non-combat mission. However, we are in a conflict zone...I also point out that they are not the principal combatants."

After four long days of debate in the House, there is still no intelligent explanation for withdrawing the CF-18s. The government wants to engage in a mission that comes at high risk to our soldiers, while denying that we are at war against the Islamic State. The cherry on top is that the minister wants our troops to fight in Libya, while our allies are recommending that we do not go there.

How much more confusing could this be?

*Statements by Members**[English]***ROBERT VELTHER**

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House with a heavy heart. I recognize the passing earlier this month of Robert Veltheer of Richmond Hill.

Bob was the founding president of Home on the Hill Supportive Housing, a charitable group whose mission is to provide inclusive, humane, and caring housing to those facing serious mental illness. Home on the Hill has also developed a successful mental illness lecture series and a family support and self-care group.

Bob led Home on the Hill from its creation to its growth over the past five years. In fact, just before his passing, Bob and other members of Home on the Hill met with representatives of York Region Housing to discuss the acquisition of units at the community hub at Crosby and Yonge. He was a husband, father, community activist, and a visionary with a strong desire to give.

On behalf of everyone in Richmond Hill, I want to thank Bob for his tremendous passion and dedication. I offer my condolences to the Richmond Hill community and the entire Veltheer family. May his legacy live on through the countless lives to be improved through his Home on the Hill.

* * *

• (1110)

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today a constituent and veteran in my riding, Ray Desjardins, turned 75 years old. He was a dedicated reservist for many years and was commissioned from the ranks to the position of infantry lieutenant.

Beyond his military service, Ray is an active member of the Nepean community. He founded the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 641 in Barrhaven and has organized many community events, such as the Year of the Veteran Gala. His dedication to Nepean and its people is remarkable.

I would like to thank Ray for his volunteerism and wish him a happy and healthy 75th birthday.

* * *

DON GETTY

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I bring the House's attention to the passing of Don Getty.

Don Getty was a former premier of Alberta from 1985 to 1992. In 1965, the leader of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party, Peter Lougheed, asked Don Getty to consider entering provincial politics. Don led Alberta for nearly seven years and presided over some of Alberta's toughest economic times.

Mr. Getty represented a large portion of what today is my riding of Edmonton Riverbend. Not only was he a politician but he also had a 10-year career as quarterback for the Edmonton Eskimos, whom he led to win two Grey Cups. To this day, the number 27 continues to grace Commonwealth Stadium on the Edmonton Eskimos' wall of fame.

Premier Getty has left behind his wife Margaret and their four children. This is a great loss today not only for Mr. Getty's family but for all of Alberta, who will be in mourning for an exceptional hard-working man.

* * *

LABOUR

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to support the many men and women in Nickel Belt and Greater Sudbury who belong to an organized labour union. As a past union member myself, I understand how unions strengthen communities. They have helped create safer workplaces, better working conditions, and recognize the need for workplace health and safety committees.

[Translation]

I believe that unions play an important role in today's economy and that they encourage business growth. Accordingly, we must treat the labour movement fairly, since unions help establish productive relations between employees and employers.

[English]

I am very proud to be part of a Liberal government that will repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. I recognize the important role that unions play in protecting the rights of Canadian workers and in helping the middle class grow.

I look forward to meeting every organized labour union in Nickel Belt and Greater Sudbury, to listen and understand their issues.

Merci, meegwetch.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, imagi'NATION collective is one of the many fantastic arts organizations in Van East.

I had the pleasure of enjoying its play, *Beneath the Surface*, at Templeton Secondary School in my riding. The play is inspired by the tragic suicide of a first nation teen in Van East. It realistically presents the real-lived experiences of many indigenous peoples and the impact of residential schools. The play skillfully touches on struggles such as poverty, isolation, cultural and gender identity, bullying, and teen suicide. It opens with traditional aboriginal practices and it concludes with an engaging group discussion with the cast.

Now its directors are transforming the play into an educational program, called building bridges. Blending performances with wellness programs, the program will cultivate youth ambassadors and promote healing, compassion, and deep understanding. This is a must-see for all students.

I ask the government to support imagi'NATION collective and bring this play to all schools across the country.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 4, the parliament of the European Union passed a unanimous resolution recognizing the Islamic State's attacks on Christians for what they are—genocide.

ISIS is guilty of committing human rights atrocities against its opponents, Muslims and Christians alike. ISIS has particularly targeted religious minorities, including Assyrian Christians and Yazidis, who it considers heretics and disbelievers. Thousands of Yazidis have been summarily executed, killed, or, in the case of Yazidi women, kidnapped and sold into slavery by ISIS. Hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled Syria amid threats by ISIS.

In Canada, the Liberal Prime Minister refuses to join the rest of the civilized world in recognizing the ISIS campaign against Christians and other religious minorities as genocide. The silence is deafening. Why does the Prime Minister not think Christians and other religious minorities are the right kind of refugees?

* * *

•(1115)

[*Translation*]

WESTJET

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, February 29, WestJet will celebrate its 20th anniversary.

[*English*]

From humble beginnings back in 1996, the airline has grown significantly over the years and today employs nearly 12,000 Canadians from coast to coast to coast. An inductee into Canada's 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures Hall of Fame and known for a strong culture of ownership, WestJet's activities account directly and indirectly for more than 70,000 full-time-equivalent jobs and produces a labour income in excess of \$3 billion.

As one of two major national scheduled carriers in this country, WestJet provides Canadians with a critically important competitive choice for their business and leisure travel. I am sure we can all agree that competition is vital to a healthy economy.

[*Translation*]

I offer my hearty congratulations and wish the company a happy 20th anniversary.

[*English*]

I wish WestJet continued success—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

FINANCE

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a feat of completely unprecedented fiscal incompetence, the government has taken us from a surplus to a \$10-billion deficit and now to a \$30-billion deficit.

It is clear as day that the Liberals misled Canadians in the last election with their bogus fiscal promises.

My question is simple. Why did the Liberals hide the truth about their agenda to massively expand the cost of government, and to run huge and growing deficits?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, it is Friday, so let me salute my family in the gallery today, and let me—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am delighted the member's family is in the gallery, but members should know that only the Speaker recognizes people in the gallery. I ask him to finish his question and stick to the subject matter.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, in answer to my colleague, we have a plan to grow this economy.

On October 19, Canadians made a real choice. They made the choice of growth. We are going to do that with our three principles. We are going to do that responsibly. We are going to continue to reduce our debt-to-GDP ratio throughout our mandate. It is still our goal to balance the budget.

Our objective, and our priority, is growth.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the problem.

Canadians made a choice based on an election promise that the government never planned to keep. The \$10-billion deficit it promised has tripled in three months.

Did the Liberals mislead Canadians during the election campaign? Why did the Liberals hide their real plans for massive spending increases and huge deficits?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The only people who do not realize that the Conservatives left behind a deficit are the Conservatives. Everyone else in Canada realizes it.

Oral Questions

We have a plan for growth, and Canadians made that choice on October 19. We will continue what we started in December when we cut taxes for the middle class. We will stay on track in the budget with the Canada child benefit, and we will implement our historic infrastructure plan. That is how we will work for Canadians.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have never seen a parliamentary secretary attack his own department for saying that the budget was balanced.

• (1120)

[*English*]

Not only are the Liberals blowing Canada's hard-won surplus, now they plan to help their Ontario Liberal friends impose a new job-killing payroll tax and a new tax on everything, a tax on carbon. All of that means fewer jobs and lower income.

Why in the world would the Liberals be killing jobs through higher taxes, particularly at a time of economic fragility?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only ones who do not understand that two months do not make a year, that nine months do not make a year, and that 12 months do make a year are the Conservatives.

We are going to have a deficit. That is what the Conservatives have left us with. Canadians made the right choice on October 19. They made the choice for growth. The IMF said it at the G20. They said we should continue to invest. At times like this, it is time to invest. That is the choice that Canadians have made. That is what we are going to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government wants Canadians to believe that deficits are good for the economy.

Obviously, the Prime Minister has never had trouble making ends meet like thousands of Canadian families do. Canadian families know that, if the government borrows money that it does not have, they will end up having to pay more taxes.

What taxes will be raised as a result of this Liberal government's incompetence?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

We reduced Canadians' taxes. In December, we cut taxes for nine million Canadians. We are going to continue with a plan for economic growth. That is what people in Canada want. We are going to continue to invest in productivity, innovation, and infrastructure.

The Conservatives left the country's finances in a sorry state, but now is the time to invest and that is exactly what we are going to do.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this type of answer from the government makes me wonder whether there is a captain on the Liberal *Titanic*.

This Liberal government does not have any economic leadership, and that is a big concern. It is imperative that we avoid structural deficits that will lead to more taxes being imposed.

How much will families have to pay for this Liberal mess?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague.

The Conservatives are the ones who sunk the economic ship, but I will repeat for the benefit of my colleague that, thanks to our plan for economic growth, we are going to continue to responsibly invest in the economy. We are going to continue to reduce our debt-to-GDP ratio throughout our mandate. It is still our goal to balance the budget.

Our priority is growth. That is the choice that Canadians made, and that is what our colleagues opposite need to learn.

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Liberals have an appalling record on employment insurance. They took \$50 billion from unemployed workers and their families when they raided the EI fund. Then they imposed massive cuts to access.

Conservative cuts of course made it even worse for those who have lost their jobs, and now fewer than four in 10 unemployed Canadians can access benefits.

The Liberals have voted in favour of the following measure before, and they promised to bring it to government, so the question is clear: Will the Liberals create a universal eligibility of 360 hours for all Canadians across the country?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in a process of Canadian consultation.

It is important that we hear from people from coast to coast to coast to reverse the mean-spirited changes implemented by the previous government that focused on the EI system helping employers, not workers, in Canada. We will change that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives caused untold hardship by eliminating access to employment insurance for workers who need it most. In my region and in many regions across the country, in Atlantic Canada and Gaspé, our seasonal industries are key drivers of the economy.

Oral Questions

The Liberals roundly condemned the Conservatives' employment insurance reforms. Now that they are in office, will the Liberals commit to reinstating the five additional weeks for seasonal workers?

• (1125)

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that we are in the process of a massive review of the employment insurance system to modernize it so that it meets the needs of seasonal workers and vulnerable workers from coast to coast to coast.

We are in the process, so I would ask all of you to participate in the EI review that is ongoing.

The Speaker: I remind the hon. minister to direct her comments to the chair. As I said yesterday, when we say “you”, usually we are talking about the Speaker, and I get a little concerned.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people need help now. They have no use for evasive answers. Workers remember to this day that the Liberals under Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien helped themselves shamelessly to the employment insurance fund in order to balance the budget. More than \$50 billion was taken from the benefits to which workers were entitled.

We are all aware of the size of the Liberals' projected deficits. Could they at least answer a very simple question? Does the government plan to dip into the employment insurance fund once again, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that gives me the opportunity to remind the House that this is the government that ran on a platform to change the EI system, which was modified in a set of mean-spirited changes by the previous government, which focused the system to help and subsidize businesses rather than dealing with the needs of Canadian workers.

We are busy working on a system to modernize the program.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, reviews do not put food on the table for unemployed workers. That is the reality.

Liberals voted for 360 hours in this House and now they are opposed to that same measure. They promised to roll back all the bad Conservative measures, but now they do not seem to mind a lot of those measures too much. They promised to never ever take money from unemployed workers again, and now they are opposing a House motion that actually forces them to keep their promise.

At a time of growing unemployment and growing layoffs, why are they breaking their promises to Canadian unemployed workers?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to promise the House of Commons and the citizens of Canada that we

made a commitment to improve employment insurance, to actually make it a modern system that meets the needs of business and workers, which was a priority that the previous government ignored in its mandate.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that Liberal deficits are skyrocketing, balanced budgets are out the window, and the Prime Minister continues to spend on foreign climate change projects that are costing Canadians billions of dollars. Now we learn that the Minister of Environment has picked a fight with the premiers of Saskatchewan and Yukon by forcing a harmful carbon tax on them.

After all the minister's rhetoric about co-operative federalism and all the warm and fuzzy platitudes about a new relationship with the provinces and territories, what happened to sunny ways?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to share sunny ways with the hon. member in Paris, where we went and we did our part to tackle climate change.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

It is so nice to see members getting along so well, but please, let us have a little order.

The Minister of Environment has the floor.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to reiterate some quotes for the member opposite, who apparently believes in climate change.

They are from the CEOs of Shell, Total, and major oil and gas companies. “We firmly believe that carbon pricing will discourage high carbon options and reduce uncertainty”. Furthermore, “We now need governments around the world to provide us with this framework”.

Once the—

• (1130)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the minister not understand that Canadians did not give her a mandate to suck billions of dollars out of western Canada to spend on Liberal climate change projects?

It is clear that the minister's “my way or the highway” approach to federalism is quickly turning into another national energy plan fiasco. The premiers of Yukon and Saskatchewan have said a very clear “no” to a harmful carbon tax grab.

When will the minister finally do what she promised and listen to all Canadian premiers?

Oral Questions

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very delighted that next week the Prime Minister will be sitting down with the premiers from the provinces and the territories to talk about how we are going to tackle climate change together.

We believe that we need to be doing this together. The provinces and territories have shown leadership on climate change, and now it is time for us to step up to the plate and do something, because the Conservatives did nothing for the last 10 years.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, northern communities are feeling the pressure of a weak economy, a lack of support to the resource sector, and cuts to the territorial transfers. Instead of moving to relieve this pressure, the Liberals have decided to increase it by introducing a carbon tax.

We all know a carbon tax is a tax on everything. With businesses failing and people losing their jobs, how does the Liberal government expect northerners to absorb this tax?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were elected by Canadians to take action on climate change, something the previous government did nothing on. We are going to take action. We are going to be working with the provinces and territories. In fact, 80% of Canadians will be living in a province or territory with a price on carbon as a result of the leadership of the provinces.

We are going to take action, and we are going to do this in co-operation with the provinces and territories.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the north, people depend on hydrocarbons. They fuel the planes that bring in the goods. They fuel the trucks that deliver those goods to communities, and they fuel the generators that provide electricity in many of the communities. Using hydrocarbons in the north is a matter of survival, not a luxury. With the price of goods in the north already much more expensive than the rest of Canada, why are Liberals punishing hard-working northerners?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is also happening in the north is the permafrost is melting. What happens then is people's lives are changed. They cannot actually do traditional hunting. Schools are actually having to close because the ground they are on is not stable.

We need to take action on climate change, and we are going to take action, because it is the right thing to do, and it will also move us to a low carbon future, create new innovations, and new jobs.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were able to build a consensus across the country on the need for a modern and comprehensive agreement on internal trade. We know that the deadline for a new agreement is fast approaching, and the current minister has recently met with his provincial counterparts on this subject. The only thing the Liberals have done since getting elected is to consult, consult, and, yes, more consultations.

Can the minister confirm that the Liberals are not holding up the agreement by adding new demands, more red tape, or asking for excessive consultations?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the last 10 years the previous government said it would act, but it actually did not do anything on internal trade.

What we have done is that the minister has met with his provincial and territorial counterparts, and they are working toward reducing barriers and toward improvement so that we will have more economic growth, bring prosperity, and have a much more innovative economy for the future from coast to coast to coast.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the Saudi oil minister announced that OPEC is willing to ride out this downturn. In fact, it is hoping that this will force competitors like Canada right out of the business. With thousands of jobs being lost in Alberta and Saskatchewan, the current Liberal government is content to continue to have foreign oil flow into eastern refineries.

When will the current Liberal government stand up and show the courage to approve and allow critical infrastructure like pipelines, and create jobs?

• (1135)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

We have said many times in this House that we feel for the families of the resource-producing provinces in this country, with the hardships they are going through. There are things we do not control, on which other countries make decisions, and the global commodity prices are affecting all of us.

We will continue, as we have said, to allow the National Energy Board to complete its very robust process. As that process continues, we will be happy to inform my colleague as it progresses.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Scarborough Southwest bizarrely accused opposition members of confusion around marijuana laws, before he stirred the pot, once again, by saying: “the only control that is in place is the current criminal sanction for the production and trafficking of marijuana”.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada seems to be telling Canadians that possession of marijuana is now legal. No wonder Canadians and law enforcement officials are confused.

Oral Questions

Can the parliamentary secretary now clear the haze and clarify his government's position on marijuana?

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear that the laws of Canada are in effect. Respect for the rule of law is a foundational principle of both this House and of our nation. Until laws are changed by this House, the law is the law is the law.

We have been clear that we are resolved to improve the controls of access to marijuana through strict regulation. Until a new and stronger regulatory regime can be put in place, we must rely on all existing laws to protect our communities and keep our communities safe.

I would remind the member once again that the law is the law is the law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that just confirms that the government has been improvising on the marijuana file from the beginning. The Prime Minister says that marijuana will be legalized in one year. The parliamentary secretary doubts that it will happen by the end of their term. In the meantime, Canadians continue to fall victim to antiquated laws, as is the case with one of my constituents, who has to serve a year in prison for growing his own cannabis.

If the government can distinguish between decriminalization and legalization, why does it not do the right thing immediately by decriminalizing the possession of cannabis for personal use?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only controls that currently exist on the access that our kids have to marijuana are the laws that currently exist in this country. It would be irresponsible to put our kids and communities at risk by removing all controls until a new stronger, clearer regulatory regime can be put in place.

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ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader rose in his place yesterday to speak about the ethical screens put in place for the Minister of Justice. The ethical screen, however, does not prevent the Minister of Justice from discussing or even voting on projects at the cabinet table brought forward by her husband's clients.

Will the Minister of Justice finally recognize the holes in her so-called ethical screen and step down from her cabinet committees?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take advice on the appropriate ethical screens from the Ethics Commissioner. I can inform the House that the Minister of Justice and her husband have met with the Ethics Commissioner and she has confirmed that all of the appropriate and required compliance measures are in place, and the minister and her husband will follow them meticulously.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday this House heard the justice minister was the former chair of the First Nations Finance Authority and now her husband, conveniently, is its paid lobbyist.

We now know that the current government is hiding behind ethical smokescreens. The justice minister sits on six cabinet committees and is directly responsible for funding the aboriginal justice strategy.

It is clear to Canadians that the justice minister is in a conflict. When will she do the right thing and recuse herself from these cabinet committees?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only that member would find an ethical smokescreen on the Internet.

The Ethics Commissioner has in fact posted that all the compliance measures are in place. The minister will be following them.

Let me be clear, Dr. Raybould has 30 years of experience—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member knows that we do not use personal names in the House. We refer to ministers by their title.

Oh, it is her husband. Excuse me. Yes, that you can do.

• (1140)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I did know that. That is why I was referring to the minister's husband, Dr. Raybould, who has 30 years' experience and a Ph.D. from Cambridge in a very specific aspect of business. His business is entirely compliant with the minister's ethical obligations. The Ethics Commissioner has confirmed that, and that member should not be putting spurious accusations—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, David MacNaughton was Dalton McGuinty's right-hand man and helped to run Ontario's economy into the ground. He was the boss of the current Prime Minister's chief of staff at the lobbying firm StrategyCorp. For this, he was rewarded with the job as Canada's ambassador to the U.S. He recently met with the American ambassador in that role. The problem is that he is still listed as a chairman of that same lobbying company. How can the Liberals think it is ethical to be a lobbyist and an ambassador at the same time?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that appointments as heads of mission are subject to the appropriate controls from the Ethics Commissioner. Obviously, the ambassador would have ensured that all of his previous business arrangements are in compliance with his new role, and the Ethics Commissioner is the person whose advice we always follow on those matters.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, StrategyCorp lobbies the Prime Minister's Office, the Privy Council Office, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and countless other departments. It is even lobbying for the finance minister's own company, the firm Morneau Shepell Ltd. The ambassador designate is still the chairman of a major lobbying firm that lobbies the very people who appointed him, including the Prime Minister's Office. What is it that the Liberals just do not understand about conflicts of interest?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the idea that people on this side of the House have any lessons to take from the other side of the House with respect to following the conflict of interest regime is a bit rich.

What the member is obviously having trouble understanding is that the Conflict of Interest Act and the code that is applicable is applied by the independent Ethics Commissioner. If the Conservatives think there is a significant problem here, they are free to go and meet with the Ethics Commissioner or, in fact, file a formal complaint. The fact that they have not done so confirms that they know there is no material whatsoever, except to stand up at question period and make those accusations.

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[Translation]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, right before the election and, not surprisingly, in a shroud of secrecy, the Conservatives imposed a new financial system for all modern treaties, which goes against those very same treaties. The Liberals have promised a new era of nation-to-nation relationships with Canada's first nations. Now is the time to prove it and to deliver on that promise.

Will the government put an end to this totally unjust and above all illegal policy?

[English]

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the fiscal arrangement that was put in place by the former government is not a fair process. It was not done in consultation with first nations people; rather, it was imposed upon them. We are undertaking to look at that full fiscal arrangement. We had met with a number of indigenous governments across Canada. We will continue to do so, and we look forward to implementing a new fiscal framework.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of indigenous children abused in residential schools have been denied justice after the government used a legal loophole against them. It has been a month since the Liberals promised urgent action. Not only has this not happened, but today we learned that the oversight committee will not investigate why the government was allowed to use a legal technicality to deny these legitimate claims.

Will the Minister of Justice now direct her officials to abandon their legal loopholes and instead start working to bring justice to these victims?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we certainly are aware of the situation raised by the hon. member. The Department of Justice officials will continue to work with first nations to resolve these conflicts and these issues. In any given situation, it is ultimately up to the tribunal in question, but we are apprised of the situation and will continue to work co-operatively to get it resolved.

* * *

● (1145)

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nine in 10 Canadians in the private sector are employed by small businesses across this country. Small businesses are key drivers of the Canadian economy, and a vital part of our growth.

Could the Minister of Small Business and Tourism explain what this government is doing to encourage and support gender balance among Canada's entrepreneurs and small businesses?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that entrepreneurs are key to Canada's prosperity. This week I presented eBay Canada's entrepreneurial awards, and for the first time all three recipients were women.

This government is committed to increasing opportunities for women entrepreneurs, young people, and under-represented groups. We are supporting entrepreneurs through programs like BizPaL, Canada Business Network, and CanExport, and we are committed to reducing the administrative burden, so entrepreneurs can grow their businesses, create jobs, and lead the world in innovation.

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ETHICS

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Kevin Fram is a close personal friend of the Irvings. He has told us that. However, as chief of staff for the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, he let himself be lobbied by the Irvings anyway. In spite of that serious lapse in judgment, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons then hired him as senior adviser.

With one minister after another in a conflict of interest, how can Canadians have any confidence in the government?

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it looks as if on Friday, today, we have found another fan of the book *Something from Nothing*.

As minister, I and my team held many meetings with stakeholders on issues related to my mandate. The individual the member is talking about was a fine public servant at the time in my department and attended these meetings as my acting chief of staff. He was doing his job. He did it well. All the rules were followed. The system works.

Oral Questions

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is punching holes in his supposed ethics screen with every hire. A case in point is senior adviser Kevin Fram, who shares the same glaring conflict of interest as his boss. We know this because Fram declared his close personal friendship with the Irvings over a decade ago.

How can the House leader possibly maintain any credibility on ethics when his entire office is tied to the Irvings?

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the government House leader said, it is really hard to take ethical advice from that side of the House. I am sure all Canadians would agree with that. As the House leader said, if opposition members believe they have something other than standing here in question period trying to make people look bad, why do they not file a complaint?

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Democratic Institutions does not seem to take the democratic part of the title too seriously. Alberta elects senators through Senate nominee elections; however, when appearing in a Senate committee on Wednesday night, the minister confirmed that the Liberals have no intention of abiding by this democratic process.

Why will the Liberal Prime Minister not accept the Alberta Senate election results? Why are they thumbing their nose at Albertans?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over a decade, Canadians have waited for real change when it comes to the Senate. We are ready to deliver. Let me say exactly what that democratic process looks like. It means that every single Canadian from every corner of this nation is going to be given the opportunity to apply to be part of the Canadian Senate, and finally for that to be a merit-based non-partisan process that ensures that we have the highest calibre of candidates in place.

I assure the member if he awaits that process, if he sees the quality of candidates that will come from it, he will see just how well it works.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we just heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice tell the House that “a law is a law”, and that all laws need to be followed in Canada.

We are hearing from many on-reserve first nations people who are disturbed that the government is not enforcing the law, the first nations accountability law that allows first nations people to know how their band is spending their money.

If a law is a law is a law, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary, will they enforce the law that already exists to give first nations people access to the information on how their money is spent?

• (1150)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone, including first nations governments, wants to see increased transparency, and we certainly do as well.

We are working in partnership with first nations leadership and organizations to ensure that we have the proper process in place. We do not believe in a top-down process. We believe in working together collaboratively to implement solutions to these transparency requirements. In fact, they are required to table these documents with their band councils.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years, successive Liberal and Conservative governments mismanaged Canada's immigration program, creating huge backlogs and long wait times. People are forced to live in uncertainty or to be separated for long periods of time. It currently takes nearly a year and a half to sponsor a child and more than two years to sponsor a spouse.

Can the minister explain and inform this House on what concrete actions he will take to shorten wait times and to help reunite families quickly?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. I am entirely in agreement with her that the current situation is a mess when families' waiting times have ballooned and mushroomed over the last decade. It is my single top priority to bring those processing times down sharply over the coming years. The House and Canadians will hear that we will have a concrete, specific plan with specific targets to get this job done as quickly as possible.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, platitudes are no replacement for actions. As a proud immigrant Canadian, I know the importance of having one's family around when one is new to a country. Parents and grandparents are key supports in a family unit.

However, some families are waiting for up to 10 years to be reunited, and that is when they are able to submit an application at all. This program needs more than a simple increase to the application quota; it needs a total overhaul. Will the minister fix the program so that families can be reunited quickly?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I basically agree with the propositions of the hon. member. I would point out that in our platform we committed to double, from 5,000 to 10,000, the number of parents and grandparents who could apply every year. That has been done. We have promised to increase the budget for family class unification. That may well be done in the budget to come.

We are on track on this, but we appreciate the urgency that the member conveyed. I can promise that we will move as quickly as possible to achieve these—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

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PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Cancer Society recently issued a report that shed some very discouraging light on the state of palliative care in Canada. However, instead of dealing with this sad fact first as its number one priority, the Liberal government seems to be focusing all its efforts on physician-assisted suicide.

Why is the Liberal government working so hard on a plan to allow living people to die, rather than helping dying people to live?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank this member for the question and also for his excellent work on the joint committee on physician-assisted death.

As the member knows very well, we have been placed in a situation where there is a hard deadline to meet. The effort towards coming to a response in the Carter decision is one that is driven by the court. It is not exclusive to the efforts that need to be taken to improve the system of palliative care in this country. These are not mutually exclusive. We are and should be working on both at the same time.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian seniors have worked hard to build our great country. Seniors deserve dignity, our thanks, and our respect.

One in six Canadians is a senior. Seniors are also one of Canada's most vulnerable groups. The Liberal euthanasia plan will put our seniors at risk, especially seniors with dementia. The Liberal euthanasia plan is a dangerous plan that ignores instructions from the Supreme Court of Canada.

Why is the Prime Minister not protecting our most vulnerable Canadian seniors?

• (1155)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank that member for the question and for his excellent work on the committee.

The tone of the question is truly unfortunate, because the committee did work so well together. We are going to be relying on all parliamentarians to take very seriously the responsibility that the minister identified to protect our most vulnerable, while at the same time respecting the decision of the court.

That is a process that has been given a key initial stage with this report, and it is a process that will continue through the crafting and the debate of the legislation here and in the Senate.

Oral Questions

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a man I know personally and consider a friend now faces 11 years behind bars in a foreign country.

Indonesia's supreme court has overturned the acquittal of Canadian teacher Neil Bantleman. The crimes he is accused of are unfounded and unwarranted.

Rather than hearing platitudes about the Canadian embassy being in contact with the family, I would like to ask the minister if he has spoken to his Indonesian counterpart. What assurances was he able to secure that this miscarriage of justice will not continue?

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is deeply concerned and dismayed by the decision of the supreme court of Indonesia to overturn the acquittal of Mr. Bantleman.

I have personally spoken with the brother of Mr. Bantleman yesterday, and reiterated our commitment to work with him on this case. Late last night, the minister spoke with his counterpart, the Indonesian foreign minister, and reiterated our point of view that this was a miscarriage of justice and that this case will have serious consequences on Indonesia's reputation for people to live, work, and travel abroad to Indonesia.

[Translation]

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was travelling abroad this week to discuss important international issues and security with his counterparts.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell the House about the various meetings he attended and the response of the international community regarding the important work that Canada is doing abroad?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[English]

This week, the minister met with his German counterpart and discussed pressing global challenges, such as the fight against ISIL, mass migration, and the situation in Ukraine.

In Turkey, the minister participated in the High Level Partnership Forum on Somalia, where Canada received much praise from the President of Turkey for Canada's engagement in the Syrian refugee crisis.

[Translation]

Our international partners regard Canada, under this government, as a strong ally, a partner, and a friend.

Oral Questions

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cyclone that hit Fiji last weekend has caused massive damage and left a trail of destruction that requires a major recovery effort.

International teams are being deployed, as we speak, to assist Fijians in their time of need. Canada is home to a dynamic Fijian diaspora, many of them in my own riding. They stand ready to lend their support to any government effort.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development tell Canadians what the government is doing to assist Fiji in its recovery efforts?

[Translation]

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

I know my colleagues will join with me in conveying an expression of Canada's compassion towards the Fijian people.

Canada made an initial contribution through the emergency disaster assistance fund to support the Red Cross emergency relief operation. Our ambassador to New Zealand is in regular contact with Fijian authorities. We continue to monitor the situation in order to ensure that humanitarian needs are being met and to provide additional support as needed.

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reiterate the member on the other side's question.

Cyclone Winston, a category 5 hurricane, just struck the island nation of Fiji. Thousands of homes were destroyed, and even more people have been displaced. My riding of Surrey Centre, along with many others across this country, is home to thousands of Fijian Canadians who have loved ones in Fiji.

Canada has a long and rich history of responding when our friends are in need. Could the Minister of International Development please tell the House what Canada is doing to assist?

● (1200)

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Surrey Centre for his dedication to this file.

We all join in expressing Canada's sympathy to the people of Fiji who are dealing with the devastating impacts of Cyclone Winston.

Canada has made an initial contribution through the emergency disaster assistance fund to support the Red Cross's emergency relief operation in Fiji. We are providing emergency shelter and essential relief items to approximately 5,000 affected people. We are in regular contact with officials in Fiji to ensure that their current needs are being addressed and are prepared to support a larger appeal when the longer-term needs are better known.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, the court ruled that individuals are allowed to grow medical marijuana at home, and everyone knows that the Liberals intend to make this substance available to everyone.

I imagine that they believe it will be legal to grow cannabis in one's basement or even in one's garden, next to the carrots, tomatoes, and vegetables. If that happens, marijuana will be more accessible to children and difficult to control.

How does the government plan to keep marijuana out of the hands of children?

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is well aware that the Allard decision is about medical marijuana for people who are ill and need it, and must have access to it. It is prescribed by medical professionals.

The Allard decision was released, and it is important that we take the necessary steps and the time to examine it. We will be consulting with my colleague, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, on the court's ruling. Once we have had time to study the implications, the government will consider the next steps.

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[Translation]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all week, the Minister of Transport repeated that he was proud and very happy that Air Canada did not have to abide by the law.

As a result, 1,800 Aveos workers who lost their jobs no longer have any recourse. The minister chose to side with the offenders. Today, I am giving the government a chance to respectfully respond to the workers and their families, instead of feeding us the same old lines.

Why does it refuse to enforce its own act?

[English]

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is pleased by Air Canada's announcement of its intention to purchase Bombardier's C Series aircraft. The C Series is a major advancement in aviation. I am certain that this addition to the Air Canada fleet will be a major benefit, both to that company and to Canada's aerospace sector.

I further commend Air Canada's intention to facilitate the creation of a centre of excellence on aircraft maintenance in Quebec, which will create additional employment opportunities in this sector.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the current Prime Minister participated in a demonstration in 2012, when he gave his word to Aveos workers. He said, and I quote, “It is such a shame that we have to demonstrate to ask the law and order government to obey the law”.

More recently, he said, “It is not true that our best resources are in the ground somewhere. Our best resources are human resources”.

Is that how a prime minister keeps his word?

[English]

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that, of course, the Government of Canada is pleased by Air Canada's announcement of its intention to purchase the Bombardier CSeries aircraft. It is a major advancement in aviation. I am certain that this addition to the Air Canada fleet will be of major benefit, both to that company and to Canada's aerospace sector across the country.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the group that the Conservatives set up to review the Canada Transportation Act submitted its report yesterday.

The report includes ridiculous recommendations, such as replacing St. Lawrence River pilots with drones. We were shocked to see that it says nothing at all about enhancing rail safety.

Rather than listen to the Conservatives, will the federal government finally listen to Quebec cities and demand that rail companies provide real-time updates on what is going on in our nation, and will it force them to stop using DOT-111 cars?

• (1205)

[English]

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk about the Canada Transportation Act.

The report from the Canada Transportation Act review embodied many months of hard work and significant public consultation. We are pleased that stakeholders across Canada were active in providing their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing transportation in the years ahead.

In the coming weeks and months, this government will be engaging with public and private stakeholders with a view to setting a forward agenda for transportation in Canada in the future.

The Speaker: I thank members for their generally excellent conduct today.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House to table the following document from the website of the Ethics Commissioner in regard to the Minister of Justice. It states that an initial compliance process is still being completed. There are no clearly defined rules from the Ethics Commissioner.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Finance entitled, “Our Consultations in Advance of the 2016 Budget: The Interim Report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance”. An interim report at this stage is somewhat unusual, however, the committee wanted the House and the minister to know the broad range of topics the committee heard at their earliest possible time and provide a link to those submissions.

We know the budget is on March 22. We will present our final report before then, on March 11. However, we wanted the minister and the House to be aware of the great presentations and submissions that came to committee.

* * *

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (school authorities).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce my first private member's bill in the House of Commons this afternoon.

Canadians pay for their schools through municipal or provincial taxes. The schools are then charged GST on almost everything they purchase. Then they are reimbursed 68% after completing time-consuming paperwork quarterly. My bill seeks to amend the Excise Tax Act to have them reimbursed the full 100%.

As a former executive member of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association and a long-time serving member of the local school board in Saskatoon, this has been a passion of mine for the last five years. Now, as a member of Parliament, I hope to rectify this situation with my private member's bill.

It is such a simple statement and amendment of only 30 words. It is so little, but it would mean so much to so many in our classrooms in our great country of Canada.

I hope my colleagues will support my bill today.

Routine Proceedings

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

●(1210)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (inflicting torture).

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to table my private member's bill, an act to amend the Criminal Code, inflicting torture.

Article 5 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". The UN Convention Against Torture, which Canada ratified in 1987, is in place for this very purpose. However, the Canadian Criminal Code falls short of addressing this major issue.

While a torture offence exists in the code under section 269.1, it only addresses acts perpetrated by state officials. When private individuals, acting outside of state authority, carry out equivalent acts that amount to torture, they are normally charged with aggravated assault. This does not properly reflect the human rights abuses that have been committed.

Private acts of torture have occurred in Canada and remain an issue in need of attention. These acts far exceed the offence of aggravated assault. This bill attempts to rectify the issue.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

NATIONAL MATERNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM STRATEGY ACT

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-243, An Act respecting the development of a national maternity assistance program strategy and amending the Employment Insurance Act (maternity benefits).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce my private member's bill. This bill has two parts to it.

The first part seeks to amend our Employment Insurance Act to provide more flexibility to females who become pregnant and work in hazardous employment conditions.

The second part calls on the government to form a national strategy with respect to maternity assistance that respects the labour market of today and, in particular, a labour market that is more demanding of women to work in employment that may have hazardous conditions.

The bill was inspired a constituent of mine, Melodie Ballard. Melodie is a welder in my community. When she became pregnant, she suffered extreme hardships financially as a result of not having an employment insurance system that could accommodate the fact that she worked in hazardous conditions.

It is a pleasure to present the bill today. I believe the bill would have national impacts and could help with the changing labour markets in Canada.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

LEIF ERIKSON DAY ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-244, An Act to establish Leif Erikson Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure, on behalf of over one million Canadians of Scandinavian origin, to reintroduce this bill, which would designate October 9 as Leif Erikson day in Canada.

As we know, since 1964, October 9 has been designated Leif Erikson day in the United States. For those of us who are of Scandinavian, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Danish or Icelandic heritage, it is very important that our contributions be acknowledged to Canada as a whole. In my case, my mother's family came across from Fredrikstad, Norway.

I am pleased to say that this bill has received support from Scandinavian organizations across the length and breadth of our great nation, including in Burnaby, British Columbia, the Scandinavian centre. I hope the bill will receive the support of all members of Parliament and we will finally have Leif Erikson day in Canada on October 9.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

●(1215)

*[Translation]***POVERTY REDUCTION ACT**

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-245, an act concerning the development of a national poverty reduction strategy in Canada.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today it is my great honour to introduce my first bill, a bill to reduce poverty.

I have done community work my whole life, and my goal has always been to help build a more just and inclusive society. That is why I am introducing this bill to develop a national poverty reduction strategy.

As the progressive opposition party, we care about reducing social inequality and building stronger communities. It is high time the federal government showed some leadership, which it can do by passing this bill for a comprehensive strategy to reduce and fight poverty. We must act now.

I invite all of my colleagues from all parties here in the House to pass my bill at second reading.

Routine Proceedings

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

[*English*]

MODERNIZING ANIMAL PROTECTIONS ACT

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-246, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Fisheries Act, the Textile Labelling Act, the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act and the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act (animal protection).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the modernizing animal protections act, a bill to help bring our country's animal welfare laws into the 21st century.

The bill addresses three specific and achievable goals. First, it aims to end the cruel practice of shark finning by banning the importation of shark fins. Second, it aims to strengthen and modernize our Criminal Code, from closing loopholes related to animal fighting to introducing a gross negligence offence for animal cruelty, as proposed by former Liberal governments, through the Hon. Anne McLellan and Irwin Cotler. Third, it aims to ban the sale of cat and dog fur in Canada and to require source fur labelling.

Canadians across our country, from farmers to pet owners, care about animal welfare. We expect our leaders and our legislators to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

Our government ran on a platform of fairness, and the bill directly addresses the fair treatment of animals in our society.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

● (1220)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-247, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (passive detection device).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce a bill on behalf of Canadians who have been affected by a drunk driver. I would like to thank the member opposite, the member for Langley—Aldergrove for his wonderful support on this.

Impaired driving continues to be the leading criminal cause of death in Canada, claiming almost twice as many lives per year as all categories of homicide combined. Over 1,000 Canadians are killed every year because someone chose to drive while impaired or drunk when they should have taken a taxi or a bus.

The bill would amend the wording of the Criminal Code to call this what it really is, vehicular homicide. It would also authorize the use of passive alcohol sensors by peace officers as an aid to use during roadside stops or RIDE programs. This passive device provides an easy, reliable, and non-intrusive method of efficiently screening drivers with minimum delay. This type of device has been used in other jurisdictions by peace officers and has proven highly effective.

It gives me great pride to introduce this bill that would ultimately keep our roads safer.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I wonder if I could seek unanimous consent of the House to table the “Fiscal Monitor” for November and December to assist the parliamentary secretary and the Minister of Finance in their answers. This clearly does show that the Conservative government did leave a surplus for the Liberals.

I would like consent to table these two reports. They are from the finance minister's own department, so I am hoping the Liberals will want to read them.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle have the unanimous consent of the House to table these documents?

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not seeing any consent.

* * *

PETITIONS

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of approximately 580 constituents in my riding, I am here to present a petition regarding a fair electoral representation. Petitioners are demanding a fair voting system. They want an equal and effective voice for their votes to be represented in Canada. More specifically, they are asking for proportional representation.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present this petition from constituents that highlights that in the last Parliament, the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion calling on the government to create a national strategy on palliative care to ensure that every Canadian has access to high-quality palliative care at the end of their life. The petitioners say that it is impossible for a person to give informed consent to assisted suicide if palliative care is not available. They are therefore calling on the government to ensure that adequate palliative care is provided to anyone considering assisted suicide.

Government Orders

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition to the House from constituents in my riding of South Okanagan—West Kootenay, who point out that our present electoral system produces a Parliament where the number of MPs for each party does not reflect the number of voters who supported that party. They ask that the House undertake public consultations across Canada to amend the Canada Elections Act and introduce a form of real proportional representation after those consultations.

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this moment to table a petition signed by 125 residents of London West and southwestern Ontario regarding the issue electoral reform. The signatories call for the Government of Canada to hold public consultations throughout the country, amend the Canada Elections Act, and introduce a suitable form of proportional representation.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we engage in the conversation on democratic reform, there are certainly a number of people in my riding who have decided that their preferred option is proportional representation. I am presenting this petition on their behalf today.

• (1225)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a petition from Fair Vote Canada. The petitioners are calling for the House of Commons to cast an equal and effective vote to be represented fairly in Parliament by changing the Canada Elections Act, and to also ensure that there is fair representation across the country with proportional representation. They are calling on the government to engage in consultation and to bring in these changes.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from members of my constituency on the same topic.

JUSTICE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December 2014, Cassandra Kaake was murdered. She was 31 weeks pregnant with her preborn daughter, Molly. Molly matters. I have a petition of over 100 people from my constituency and the town of Westlock who feel that this needs to be amended. Our current Criminal Code has no protection for the preborn human. Therefore the petitioners call upon the Parliament of Canada to consider this and bring forward legislation to protect the preborn human.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like a number of other members, I am pleased to present a petition today prepared by an organization called Fair Vote Canada. In my case, I was approached by a number of its members, who gave me several pages and asked me to present it here today, just like I suspect many other members with similar petitions were probably approached. The petitioners argue that the first-past-the-post electoral system is unfair and propose that the best alternative is a proportional system. They seem to favour multi-member proportional representations, which is certainly one of the options that will be under discussion over the next year as we look at different forms of voting systems for this country.

ABORTION

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions to table today. The first two petitions are from residents in central Alberta, who basically outline the fact that Canada is one of the only modern nations in the world that does not have any laws around proscribing abortion nor any policy restricting it. The petitioners call upon this House to enact legislation to address that particular issue.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another two petitions signed by many people in central Alberta asking the government and the House of Commons to put legislation in place to prevent sex-selective abortions, which is an atrocious thing that can happen in our nation.

JUSTICE

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition from folks in central Alberta who want to see legislation that would recognize preborn victims.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up the question, the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock had five minutes remaining for the period for questions and comments. We will go to that now.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader.

*Government Orders***Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member to reflect on the past election, when the leader of the Liberal Party committed to restoring balance in the labour legislation that the Conservative Party had brought in via two private members' bills without proper consultation and without going through the normal process of working with different stakeholders. That is why we have this bill before us today.

I am asking if the member would, at the very least, recognize that the legislation he will in all likelihood vote against is here to rectify a wrong by the previous Conservative government and that to do so was election commitment by our leader. Would the member be suggesting that the government not keep its election commitment?

• (1230)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member started his question by referencing private members' bills, a very important aspect of this whole debate. During the last Parliament, unprecedented numbers of private members' bills were passed, which speaks to the level of democracy in this place then. Everyone was able to bring forward things they were passionate about and that spoke to their ridings. The member may correct me, but if I am correct, 42 private members' bills were passed in the last Parliament. That was unprecedented, so when the member talks about being democratic, that was being democratic.

Democracy is essentially all about votes, and a secret ballot vote is the pinnacle of democracy. However, there are many other things that come with living in a democratic society. Some of those include freedom of association, the freedom of expression, and other such things. Those are the other aspects that must come into play.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the secret ballot component, because that is one of the most egregious changes in this bill. A secret ballot protects the employee. It is not in favour of the union. It is not in favour of the employer. It is something that would allow the member employee to exercise his or her democratic rights in private.

I would like my colleague to talk a bit more about the importance of that component of the legislation that we are moving back from.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is exactly correct when she says that we are standing up for workers' rights. We are the only party that stands up for the Canadian worker. Both of the other parties are in bed with the unions and would essentially like to see all of Canadian society unionized.

It is interesting that earlier in this debate, one of the members mentioned that we should have mandatory times when organizations should have a vote to see if they want to be unionized. It is an interesting idea, but I have not seen if that is something they wanted. Do unions from time to time have a vote to see if everyone wants to continue with the union? That is one of the things I have never seen, and I do not think it will be a viable option.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the context of the discussion today, talking about workers, I would like to say that I am a former carpenter. I still am a carpenter. I still have my card that I carry in my

wallet today. My dad was a former union carpenter. The member who just spoke is an auto mechanic.

We are workers ourselves. In the context of our debate today, we have real experience with the groups and want to see what is good for the workers as opposed to the unions that are above them.

I just want to ask the member a question. In terms of the Liberal platform where they talked about accountability, is this offside with that policy or not?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, accountability is one part of the bedrock of our democratic society.

I think the Liberals are way offside, calling this accountable.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-4. Of course it goes without saying that I will be supporting this bill at second reading.

We spent the last 10 years under constant attack from the previous Conservative government with respect to workers' rights. Obviously I will be talking about Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which were introduced in the previous Parliament. I will come back to them later in my speech.

There have been flagrant examples in recent years. It was almost an obsession. I am talking about the Conservative Party's attitude towards the workers at Canada Post and the CBC, just to name a couple. I think some people, especially on this side over here, often forget the many benefits brought about by unionization.

For example, a unionized worker earns on average five dollars more an hour than a non-unionized worker. Among women, that gap is even wider at \$6.65 an hour. This translates into greater purchasing power and more money going back into the economy. Basically, it is good for everyone. This is not rocket science. I would also remind the House that we do not hear stories about tax havens when it comes to these kinds of wages and workers.

The purpose of Bill C-4 is to repair the damage from the Conservatives' attacks against workers. First, it prevents legal challenges. According to our analysis and that of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, Bill C-377 went against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The courts would no doubt have annulled that bill because it violated the right to the freedom of association and violated the privacy of those who work for a union.

I find it rather insulting that the previous government decided to introduce a bill that it knew was easily revocable by a court. Why do that? Was it out of ideology, or flagrant disregard for workers and our institutions, including our courts? Maybe it was a cheap fundraising stunt on the backs of its supporters. We know that the Conservatives have a penchant for that type of thing. Unfortunately, we will never know, but fortunately we are here to undo the previous government's dirty tricks.

Government Orders

The Conservatives may have claimed that they introduced the bill in the hallowed name of transparency, but what they failed to say is that unions were already required to report their financial information to their members. That is a rather important detail that we do not often hear the Conservatives talk about.

Bill C-377 imposed detailed and costly reports and requirements on the unions. The Conservatives pushed the bill through, despite general opposition from the public, including constitutional law experts, the NHL Players Association, the provinces, Conservative and Liberal senators, which takes some doing, privacy experts, the Canadian Bar Association, and so on. We are not the only ones who are pleased to see Bill C-4 before the House and to see it pass quickly.

According to the parliamentary budget officer's estimates, implementing Bill C-377 would have cost much more than the \$2.4 million that the Conservatives planned to give the Canada Revenue Agency. The CRA would have spent almost \$21 million in the first two years to create the electronic database required and approximately \$2.1 million annually to maintain the system. I have not even touched on all the hours that the unions would spend to meet these requirements, which would be added to their workload, instead of protecting workers' rights.

Therefore, the repeal of Bill C-377 will save millions of dollars for both the government and the unions. I would like to quote the national president of the United Food and Commercial Workers union, which represents NDP employees:

UCFW is pleased to see the government tabling Bill C-4. Our union campaigned vigorously against the Conservative Government's Bill C-377 in the last parliament. The bill was undemocratic, and part of the Conservative government's campaign against workers and workplace democracy. It was also a major invasion of the privacy of individual union members and it infringed on provincial jurisdiction over labour issues. Repealing Bill C-377 is positive for all Canadians as this bill would have been expensive for the government to implement and monitor.

That is what I wanted to say about one-half of Bill C-4. As for Bill C-525, it sought to make it harder for workers to organize, while making it easier to decertify unions. What struck me about the bill at the time was that it was completely unfounded.

●(1240)

The government made changes to the labour laws without even proving that the old union accreditation method was a problem. I will summarize the facts.

About 10% of workers currently fall under federal jurisdiction. They are represented by a number of unions, such as public service unions, Unifor, and trade and construction unions. Before, a union was automatically accredited when more than 50% of workers signed a card indicating that they wanted to unionize. When 35% to 50% of workers signed a membership card, an election was triggered to determine whether the workers truly wanted to unionize. Bill C-525 wanted to change the threshold for triggering an election for accreditation from 35% to 40%. Furthermore, it would have also banned the automatic card check certification system.

This is yet more evidence of the previous government's disdain for workers' rights. This backwards attitude ignores the fact that, for example, the wage increases negotiated by the union inject hundreds of millions of dollars into the Canadian economy every week.

I want to get back to what I was saying earlier. One of the advantages of unionization is that it injects more money into the economy. When people earn higher wages, they consume more. We are talking about regular people, not Bay Street CEOs, who earn astronomical salaries and then send that money to some faraway island.

I applaud this bill from my colleagues opposite, who made a good decision to start their term by repealing these two harmful bills. That is a good sign. However, we must remain cautious, because this is only a sign. In recent years, my colleagues opposite waxed on and on about standing up for the middle class, but I must say that their definition of the middle class, which they are using for the tax cuts they promised during the campaign, is flawed. The threshold they use is rather arbitrary.

I would now like to talk about this dangerous new bug that everyone in the current Liberal government seems to have contracted, and that is "consultitis". That is all well and good, and I understand that some issues require a lot of discussion and consultation with experts. However, there are also some issues that have obvious answers. The government could save time on those rather than getting caught up in this constant consultation. That is what I mean by "consultitis".

The government needs to protect the middle class by taking meaningful action, not by spouting rhetoric and launching public consultations left and right. We have heard enough about consultation since this government took office. Talk is all well and good, but it does not put food on people's tables.

I therefore urge the Liberals to do more, to take more meaningful action. The benefits of doing so are tangible and easily verifiable, so let us get started.

The NDP will continue to exert pressure on the government to reinstate the federal minimum wage and vote in favour of the anti-scab bill introduced by my colleague from Jonquière. It is a common sense initiative, as is pay equity, obviously.

I find it very frustrating that problems like the ones I mentioned, which were identified decades ago, are still wreaking such havoc. Canada is a progressive country, which is obvious from our general attitude on thorny issues such as physician-assisted dying. However, I find that we sometimes drag our feet for no apparent reason. Everyone here recognizes that women and men are equals, but that belief is not reflected in our economy, where we see wage disparities that make no sense.

In closing, I realize that there are a lot of messes to clean up. After a decade under the Conservative dinosaurs, there is a lot of work to be done. That decade put us on guard. The NDP will certainly not be giving the Liberals a blank cheque, since everyone knows that they have a tendency to signal left during the election and then turn right once they take office.

Unequal distribution of wealth is not just theoretical. It is a very real problem that is beyond comprehension in a country as wealthy as Canada. Decent working conditions and decent pay are good for everyone. We all know the harmful and devastating effects of poverty. I am proud to belong to a political party that understands these issues and refuses to compromise when it comes to implementing effective measures to truly eradicate poverty and poor working conditions, which have no place in a country like Canada.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to recognize that this piece of legislation was brought in to rectify a wrong, that is, the substantial changes to the labour legislation the Conservatives brought in through the back door via the use of private members' bills. It is a fulfilment of an election promise. We appreciate the support from the New Democrats.

I was first elected to the Manitoba legislature in 1988. There was a premier just before my time whose name was Howard Pawley. He promised the union movement that he would bring in anti-scab legislation, the type of legislation that the member's party is suggesting that we vote for now. Through negotiations with the stakeholders, the NDP provincial government at the time came up with the idea that we should not have anti-scab legislation and brought in final offer selection as a compromise.

The question I have for the member is this. When he reflects on his comments with respect to the Conservative private members' bills, does he not believe that there is an obligation to work with labour and management in coming up with legislation? It seems to me that the New Democrats are attempting to do something for which they were critical of the Conservative Party doing last year. When we factor in that the NDP attempted to bring in anti-scab legislation, which did not work because it was the NDP that ultimately said no to the anti-scab legislation while they were in the quarters of power in Manitoba, where the strike of 1919 took place, and so forth, does he not recognize that there is a need to consult with labour and management?

• (1245)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that some things do not change from one election to the next. Some members, such as the gentleman opposite, have a real way with words. He is very competent and has a great deal of experience in politics.

That is an example of what I was lamenting, the fact that what we have is a lot of words but what we need is to act quickly. We have to take care of issues like these. That is why I am offering him my wholehearted support, because we agree. Just talking is pointless. That is not what Canadians expect.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree, let us not talk just for the sake of talking. Let us get to the bottom of the issue.

I listened to the NDP member's remarks, and I want to salute and thank him. He said he supports Bill C-4 almost unconditionally.

Government Orders

Bill C-4 eliminates a secret ballot. Secret ballot voting is fundamental to democracy. That is how we, the members of the House of Commons, were elected. It is also a fact that we, the Conservatives, are not the only ones who think this way.

Here is what Robyn Benson of the Public Service Alliance of Canada had to say on February 11, 2013, and I would like to point out that there is no connection between that organization and the Conservative Party:

...PSAC has no issue with voting by secret ballot. We do it regularly to elect our officers, ratify collective agreements, and vote for strike action, as examples.

Why are the New Democrats, who were all elected by secret ballot, opposed to the secret ballot voting in our proposals?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, some things change from one election to another. We have new MPs, like that member who was just elected. I want to congratulate him on his great energy. He is diving into his new role with a great deal of conviction.

That being said, I also invite him to be a little more subtle when it comes to the support he gives to former members and the policies of a former government. Many are starting to qualify their statements, saying they did not share those views.

Some awful things happened when his party was in power, and those two parts of the legislation were absolutely atrocious. The member continues to single out this one small aspect, although the general principle completely disrespected workers.

It was part of the general attitude that prevailed for the 10 years of Conservative power, and I hope that the member will help change what that party represented for the past 10 years.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot from the Conservatives in this House. They comment that some members are attacking the sanctity of private members' legislation. On the contrary, what we are attacking is when government legislation masquerades as a private member's bill.

My hon. colleague sat in the previous Parliament and knows full well that, pursuant to Standing Order 93(1), private member's legislation gets up to two hours of debate before the question is put. It does not get the scrutiny that government legislation does. Therefore, I would like to hear his comments with respect to when he sees government legislation masquerading as a private member's bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, since today's theme seems to be to talk about new members, I want to congratulate my newly elected colleagues behind me who represent a nice breakthrough in the Prairies and western Canada. I would add that these members are proud defenders of the great founding principles that helped establish the party back home.

Government Orders

I hear the comments from our new colleagues and everyone now acknowledges that we went through a decade of darkness. As for the number of votes that were held here and bills that were passed, everyone knows that there were catch-all bills and massive omnibus bills consistently containing a series of measures to establish a right-wing agenda, with little to no concern for helping the people and workers' associations who built the middle class that is the very identity of our West, our North America, and our Canada.

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we talk about this legislation that is coming forward to overturn some of our private members' bills in the past, I must speak to some of the questions and comments that have been made about it, that the way it went through this place was somehow anti-democratic. I was here and knew the members who brought them forward. I knew the consultative process that specifically Bill C-377 went through, the back and forth with caucus, with myself. There was a long process to seek honest feedback and that is why changes were made to that legislation.

The firefighters union and other unions wanted a higher threshold of expenditure. It went from a lower amount to the \$5,000 amount, so that particular individuals would not be mentioned and privacy issues, medical expenses, and that kind of thing would not be caught in this kind of legislation. That was received by the proponent of the bill and supported. The legislation was changed.

To hear a Liberal say a private member's bill somehow passed through the back door is absolutely ridiculous. It is absolutely ridiculous that he would say that about something as foundational as a private member's bill, a bill that we can bring as private members to this place, to see enacted into law. I do not just represent myself in this place. I represent 107,000 people from my riding. To say that my representation of 107,000 people is in some way the back door is ridiculous. The member needs to reflect on the private members' business that has come through the House over the last 100-plus years. I would like to challenge the member on the other side.

I want also to reflect on the secret ballot and how foundational it is to our modern democracy here in Canada. When we go to the polls, provincial, municipal, or federal, we have a little cubicle and nobody sees how we vote. Eventually the ballots are cast, the ballots are counted, and we have a winner in the election.

In this process a secret ballot is absolutely foundational in our freedom to express ourselves, which party we want to vote for, and maybe which ones we do not want to vote for. My curiosity is intrigued when I see the Liberals would want to see that kind of democratic foundation changed. Is their talk of changing the way we vote in Canada for our representatives on the horizon too now, where we are going to have to vote in a public forum and people are going to know how we vote? The Liberals seem to support that in the House with this overturning of the legislation. The next thought would lead me to believe that it may be on the horizon. If it is not, then why are they supporting something that foundational in the House?

It is purely meant to service big unions. We know that Unifor and other unions completely supported different parties in the House and

the concern is that this simply is payback for what was done during the election in October. That concerns me. It concerns me that democracy is not more important than that.

I also want to talk about my experience in a union. I have been a part of a few unions, one as a carpenter for about six months. For a longer period of time I had to become part of the union as a teacher in British Columbia. I was forced, I did not have a choice. If I wanted to become a teacher in B.C., I had to be part of the BC Teachers' Federation. I did not really want to, but I did not have any other choice and that to me is somewhat undemocratic as well. Because I wanted to be a teacher in B.C., I was forced to be part of something, rather than given the choice to be part of the union.

Fair enough. I joined the union and got my teaching job. After the first six months or year I went to a union meeting. It was a challenge. I knew the leader of the president of the BCTF, a former member of this House, was going to be there. I thought I had better show up and see what was going on with unions, especially my own, the one I had paid dues to monthly. I wanted to know how it was going to spend my hard-earned dues money.

• (1255)

At that meeting, I was told by the union president which way I was to vote in the next provincial election, and I also discovered that my union dues were funding NDP candidates in that provincial election.

There are a couple of problems with being told how to vote in a provincial election, to me, especially, as a teacher. If there is any group that should understand impartiality, it should be the teachers. I understand that. I never brought up politics in my classroom. To be told by a BCTF president how to vote in a provincial election was really beyond democratic.

I actually brought it up to her in the meeting. I put up my hand and asked if she was suggesting that this non-partisan association, the BCTF, was supposed to vote one way or the other. She looked at me strangely, as if to say, "Who is this guy?". She did not give me an answer, but she moved on to the next topic quickly. It still troubled me that she was trying to tell us how to vote in that place, regardless of which party. I did not care if she was going to tell us to vote Conservative.

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I do not think it is the place for unions, to do that. Unions should be impartially representing their members, because their members represent all parties. Certainly, I was a Conservative teacher. There were NDP teachers. There were Liberal teachers. The union represented us all. We all have to pay dues to this organization. The fact that the president was trying to tell me to vote in one particular direction troubled me greatly.

However, the next point that was brought out at the meeting was a teachers' newspaper. It boasted that a local NDP candidate was being sponsored by the B.C. Teachers' Federation. The local union body in that particular town was sponsoring an NDP candidate in that provincial election, donating to this candidate.

I had huge trouble with that, considering the fact that we are supposed to be impartial. The fact is that most members—and this is what we are getting to with this legislation—did not know that those local federation representatives were funding campaigns. To me, that was very troubling, to say the least: the fact that a group that was supposed to be non-partisan was sponsoring NDP candidates with my money, because as a member I had to pay dues to the BCTF; I did not have a choice. Confronted about this, the president of the BCTF at that time did not seem to have an answer for that either.

I will bring this back to the conversation we are having today about Bill C-377 and the accountability that is supposed to be there with this bill. Most members do not know where the money goes, with union expenditures. It can be argued that the information can be found. Yes, it can be obtained, but it is a very arduous process. It takes a long time to get all the information back. It is information that the union records—make no mistake: the union does record where the money goes. The union knows where it is, but it is not something that can be easily obtained by members.

That is what Bill C-377 was meant to do. It means to make accountable the expenditures of that fund, which is tax-free, I might add—and it still does. The money that goes into these organizations is not taxed. What I said before in debate, in support of Bill C-377, is that, if we are not against accountability, why would we be against Bill C-377.

What we are asking for are measures by which unions have to show where the expenditures are, to their members and to the public, just as I do as a member of Parliament, just as the members of the NDP have to do to their constituents. Why would we ask for anything less from a group that collects funds from its members who have to contribute? It is not voluntary. Why would we not ask for accountability from these organizations? To me, if there is nothing to hide, why not do it?

• (1300)

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the story of the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies about being required to join the B.C. Teachers' Federation.

I would note that it is no way unique to unions. If the member had wished to practise medicine, he would have had to join the medical association. If he had wished to practise law, he would have had to join the bar association. This is a common practice in many professions, not just teaching.

The member also noted that he disapproved of his union making political donations. I wonder if the member would agree that the solution to this is for the Government of British Columbia to ban both corporate and union political donations?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question in two ways.

Yes, I agree, because it was our government that brought in that legislation and basically made corporations and unions ineligible to be part of the political process federally, and so I absolutely agree to that particular part of the member's question.

The interesting part of it is that we are in a federal institution in this place and we are responsible for the laws that are brought in for this, and so we are debating Bill C-377 here on this floor. However, I cannot affect the floor in the province of B.C. or any other floor in the different provinces across this country.

The key point of it for me is the accountability in the particular bill, the democracy that it protects in the secret ballot, but also the accountability of unions to their members and the public.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member standing up to address the legislation. Having said that, primarily because of his role in terms of the private member's bill itself, I am sure he would recognize that, when we bring in a private member's bill versus a government bill, there is a substantial difference.

If one is the minister of labour, there is a process one has to go through in order to introduce legislation. As a private member, yes, one might have done some consultations and so forth, but I would argue that there is a big difference between what a private member might do and what a department does through consultation.

My question to the member is this. Will he not at the very least recognize that what the bill would really do is try to rectify a wrong? When legislation of this nature comes through the House of Commons, it should be brought through by the minister of labour, which would assist in providing more harmony within the industry, and that is, in fact, a good thing for all of Canada.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, to me, this is the Liberal Party trying to make it something that it is not.

The member is trying to say that the former government somehow coaxed this particular member into putting forth a bill that really should have gone through another process. The fact that he calls this in some way a back door is ridiculous, as I have said twice before.

I know the member who introduced this. It was a heavy topic for him. He wanted to bring it forward because of the accountability that needed to come forward, not to mention the many people he consulted within our caucus who had certain questions on the bill. He met those concerns and brought his bill forward anyway.

Therefore, to paint the picture that it is not part of the democratic process for a private member to bring something forward that is a concern for his constituency and his constituents, to me, is lacking respect at best and just ridiculous at most.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his presentation this afternoon.

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I think Canadians want a choice. They want the secret ballot. They also want to know that unions do not have a blank cheque. Canadians want to know where their union dues are going. Where are they going? Are they going for excessive travel and entertainment for just a select few? We have seen that. Yes, during the federal campaign, we have seen that. As I said earlier in the House, not once, twice, but three times, union members took selfies, for money.

Could the member give us his thoughts on how the bill would have major ramifications if it is approved in the House?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that great question.

What I just presented as my story is evidence of why we need the bill. The evidence that I submitted is exactly why we need to expose this kind of practice where union bosses try to pressure their members and use their money in political campaigns.

I would not have seen it had I not attended the meeting. There were only 12 of us in this particular room, out of thousands. This is exactly why we need a bill like Bill C-377 to expose these kinds of practices. I think members would be upset, at the very least, if they knew their money was going toward these political parties that they do not necessarily support.

To me, we need to keep Bill C-377 and the secret ballot for votes within unions, and make sure that we care about our people first and much less about fancy pictures for social media.

• (1305)

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to this bill.

As members of Parliament, it is important that we all have our finger on the pulse of the priorities of our constituents, and it is imperative that we set out to meet those needs on their behalf. For me, it has been the absolute honour of a lifetime to be able to serve the constituency of Wild Rose first and now Banff—Airdrie as member of Parliament. I want my constituents to know that I will always continue to fight for them and to stand up for their priorities and our great province of Alberta.

When I pursued public life, I did so because I wanted to give back to my community. My objective was to bring people together, whether in my riding or here in Ottawa, to help move great ideas from concepts into action, listen to Canadians, and deliver results. However, today I am here to talk about Bill C-4, one of the Liberal government's first priorities.

As an Alberta MP, my priority is to give a voice to a riding and a province that are severely impacted by falling oil prices, mass layoffs, and collapsing businesses. In addition to the Liberal mismanagement that we are seeing with a ballooning federal deficit, I was shocked to see the government put forward a bill, as one of its top priorities, aimed not at supporting workers or the more than 100,000 people who have lost their jobs as a result of the struggling oil and gas sector but, rather, a bill to please union bosses, which would reverse key transparency measures that our previous Conservative government put in place.

Specifically, the Liberal government is introducing, as one of its first priorities, legislation that seeks to reduce transparency for union

bosses by removing a requirement that the leadership share how it spends its members' union dues and removing the secret ballot provision for trade union formation and abolition. I firmly believe that this bill is critically flawed. It is flawed in that it reduces the transparency that Canadians are demanding in all areas of public administration, and it does this at a time when the government should be focused on workers, not union bosses.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with the House what it is like at home in my riding and my province right now. We are living through one of the most significant downturns of our generation. More than 100,000 people have lost their jobs in Canada, with many now risking the loss of their homes and the lives they have worked so hard to build. Almost 40,000 of those job losses are in my province of Alberta. Alberta's unemployment rate has surged to 7.4%, surpassing the national average for the first time in nearly three decades. It is a very difficult time.

In the midst of this downturn, Albertans are feeling absolutely and utterly abandoned by the Liberal government. Instead of helping the people of my province, the government has, instead, turned to kneecapping the energy industry. The Liberals are adding further uncertainty to the energy industry through their new temporary, endless regulatory processes, raising the spectre of a new carbon tax, and imposing more and more obstacles for critical market access infrastructure that, I might add, would not cost the government a single dime.

Instead, the Liberal Party has taken the stance that, if it calls a sum of money "stimulus", Albertans will keep quiet about the Liberals completely thumbing their noses at the energy industry with their new job-killing policies. I will say this: we are not going to stay quiet. I hear time and time again from my constituents and from the thousands of Albertans who work in the oil and gas sector that a plan for jobs and a strong economy is what we need right now, not a temporary, uncertain, and endless regulatory regime, and definitely not a new job-killing carbon tax.

The government should be focused on creating jobs. What we have seen from the Liberals so far is added uncertainty for pipeline development and certainly an unwillingness to stand up for our citizens who are in need of support. More taxes will not create jobs or help Albertans get back to work. Unfortunately, what we have seen, instead, from the Liberal government is that it is certainly a government that is fond of taking misguided approaches, which is what we are seeing demonstrated in Bill C-4.

• (1310)

The legislation is not focused on workers at all. In fact, it would do more harm to them. It is simply a step back for democracy, transparency, and accountability. There are so many reasons why it demonstrates how the government is going in exactly the wrong direction.

The legislation violates the fundamental principle of transparency. If the Liberals are truly trying to pride themselves on being more open, it boggles the mind as to why one of the first pieces of legislation they have introduced totally and absolutely contradicts that principle.

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Bill C-377 saw the requirement for public disclosure of a non-profit organization. Requiring public disclosure by organizations receiving substantial public benefits is not a new concept. Canadian charities have been publicly reporting their spending for at least 35 years. Nonetheless, the legislation blocks the public from seeing how any benefits the government provides to unions are being leveraged. Why are the Liberals removing this level of transparency when public disclosure creates greater credibility and support for the legitimately representative work that unions do?

Bill C-4 would enable union bosses to direct their members' fees without having any accountability to their members. They would make decisions of advocacy and conscience under a shroud of secrecy without any accountability at all to their members.

If shielding the books from the membership, the actual workers, is not enough, with Bill C-4, the Liberals are also standing against a worker's right not to join a union.

The legislation would eliminate Bill C-525 and its provisions which support Canadians free choice of whether they want to be a part of a union free from intimidation. This is what Canadians should expect in our democracy. This legislation was put in place by our previous Conservative government to further support workers.

Bill C-525 also required union organizers to get expressions of support from a very reasonable 45% of workers in federally regulated sectors in order to force a vote on union certification. Bill C-525 also ensured that the subsequent vote would then be held by a secret ballot. If a majority of workers in that collective bargaining support joining a union, then certification would proceed. The same logical process would apply in reverse should workers seek to decertify a union.

We just came through a federal election. I would have been happier with a different result, but we again experienced one of the most surreal traditions of life in a democracy, a peaceful and orderly transition of power. We use a secret ballot in our democratic system. Although the government may be looking to change the electoral system, we surely do not hear it talking about changing the critical democratic piece of a secret ballot anywhere but in the labour movement. Five provinces already employ this method of union certification. Bill C-525 would simply apply it to federally regulated sectors. Abolishing the secret ballot would be an attack on the democratic process. All members of Parliament are elected by secret ballot, so why take that away from everyday workers?

Bill C-4 is a fatally flawed piece of legislation. If the Liberals really want to help workers and their families, they should consider some facts.

Commodity prices have contributed to massive layoffs across the country and our dollar continues to drop in value. In 2015, Canada's oil and gas industry lost \$60 billion in revenue. That is equivalent to wiping out the Canadian auto sector in just one year. The IMF has downgraded its economic outlook for Canada. The household debt to income ratio of Canadians is now the highest in the G7. Canadians are suffering the consequences of these real challenges.

Unemployed Canadians are out there with no prospect of finding jobs. Working families are living with the fear every day that they

will lose their jobs. Seniors are watching their retirement savings drop as the markets struggle.

These are the challenges that should shape and drive policy that we set here. Canadians expect their government to take action. We should be seeing initiatives to keep taxes lower so Canadians have more money in their pockets to make ends meet. Instead, we see a proposed carbon tax and we see measures to increase EI premiums and taxes, measures that would add further uncertainty on our natural resources regulatory processes, a ballooning deficit, and now we have a bill today focused on union bosses rather than their workers.

These are the priorities of the Liberal government and that just demonstrates that the government has its priorities all wrong.

• (1315)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, constitutional experts have said that these bills are unconstitutional. Privacy experts have said that they breach the privacy of millions of Canadians. Seven out of ten provinces, representing 80% of the citizens of our country, have said that the responsibility lies within the jurisdiction of the provinces.

Hugh Segal, the former Conservative senator, said that it was the most insipid piece of legislation he has ever come across. Sixteen Conservative senators stood down and would not support the bill.

My colleague has said that it is all about openness and transparency. An amendment was put forward to include employer bodies; chambers of commerce; the barristers' society, which lawyers have to join if they want to practise law; and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which doctors have to join if they want to practise medicine. If it was about transparency, why did the Conservatives vote against that amendment?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about openness and transparency. We have a government that has made this one of its top priorities, to take away transparency in terms of unions. That is on top of what it has done with the First Nations Financial Transparency Act as well. It is removing transparency for first nations people to have transparency from their leaders as well. Those are the priorities of the government, to take away transparency.

People in the country are losing their jobs. People are afraid they will lose their homes. It is a difficult situation. It is a very difficult situation in my province of Alberta, and it is causing problems all across the country. What does the government do about it? I do not see them doing anything about it. In fact, it is doing everything it can to pile on and make that situation worse.

At the same time, rather than trying to do something for the workers who are hurting and trying to do something to help the energy sector recover, it is trying to remove transparency from unions and first nations.

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Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the response to the parliamentary secretary's question, but I did not hear an answer. Therefore, I will pose it again. Why did the previous bill not include chambers of commerce, religious organizations, and professional associations? Why did it only single out unions? It is a very simple question. I would like to hear a response.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I thought we were here talking about Bill C-4 today, so what I will do is talk about Bill C-4 and the government's priorities. That is what we are here to address. Clearly, its priorities are all wrong.

There are 100,000 Canadians who have lost their jobs in the last little while. We are seeing massive, ballooning deficits in just a few months under the government. It took it from a surplus to a massive deficit. Instead of trying to do something about that, it is talking about bringing in new carbon taxes. It is trying to create further uncertainty in our regulatory processes. The priority should be trying to deal with that, not trying to remove accountability and transparency from our unions.

• (1320)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a terrible day. This will be the last day of debate on this legislation, which will all but assure the end of my private member's bill, Bill C-525, which I was very pleased to have passed. It brought accountability to a process. It empowered every worker in the country currently in a union, or thinking about being in a union, or leaving a union the right to have a secret ballot vote and do what is best for them.

I was pleased to stand in this place and do this as a private member. Could my colleague talk about how important it is for members of Parliament to be empowered to do the job on behalf of their constituents and not be subjected to attacks and pointless debate about what members of Parliament should or should not be allowed to do in this chamber?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, it is a great question and a great point that the member raises, because we saw that with the current Liberal government. The Liberals have already denigrated the ability for private members to bring forward a bill in this chamber, and to be able to bring forward the issues and concerns of their constituents and their ridings. That is a shameful thing.

They talk about the ruin of transparency from unions. They have done other things to remove transparency in terms of first nations leaders to their peoples. To take members of Parliament and denigrate the ability to bring forward a private member's bill does not sound like an open or transparent government to me. That sounds like a government that has its priorities completely dead wrong.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in this debate today; I do think this is very interesting. It has been mentioned by a few of my other colleagues that we have a critical situation in terms of Alberta and the issue around oil and the prices of energy. We have issues in Quebec in terms of Bombardier.

As a country, we have many important things that we need to be dealing with, so it is absolutely ironic that of the two first bills that the current government brings forward, one is "oops" a mistake. The

Liberals made a promise about income tax. It was supposed to be revenue neutral, but it is a \$1.4 billion oops. However, they are going to bring it forward anyway and add to the deficit by \$1.4 billion. Then, of course, the next bill that the Liberals brought forward is a bill that would detract from accountability. It does speak to the priorities of the current government that the first two bills it brings forward are oops and lack of transparency.

I have an interesting history with these two bills, which might be a bit unique in this Parliament. I sat on the finance committee when Bill C-377 was going through committee. Then I also sat on the human resources committee as the parliamentary secretary for the minister of labour, as we dealt with Bill C-525. I had the benefit of hearing and really watching the progress of these bills as they went through the legislative process. I heard the opposition members stand up and talk about how this violated safety and privacy, and that people with their private health care information were going to be identified, or RCMP were going to be identified.

We did our jobs as legislators at that time, and we made a number of amendments. We heard some concerns from committees, and we did make amendments that dealt with those specific concerns. It really is a bit disingenuous when the members of the government stand up and say that this was going to violate health concerns, that information was going to be public. That was looked at and the bill was amended. I ask that they not go back to the original version when they are criticizing this bill. They need to go to the amended version, the one that was actually passed. I think that was certainly a fair point.

The Liberals talked about other professional organizations not being included. I think that is a fair point. I am a nurse by background. I was a member of the nurses' union and a member of the nursing association, so that is a fair enough point. Lawyers' associations and nurses' associations were excluded from the bill, and perhaps they should also be accountable for the same level of transparency.

The Liberals questioned why they were not included. Instead of gutting the bill, if that was their issue, why did they not just add those professional associations to the bill to create the same level of transparency for everyone? If the Liberals had some concerns, there were ways that they could have added things.

There were concerns mentioned in terms of the red tape. I am sorry, but in this age of computers, the ability to generate and submit reports has become very easy. I challenge anyone in this House to go to a special site on the website for the United States Internal Revenue Service, where people can see the information they need to see. This is not something that was dreamed up out of the blue. This has been in the United States for many years, and I do not think it created the big challenges and problems that people were speaking to.

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I do recognize that some unions are very good about sharing information. I talked to people at the International Union of Operating Engineers, and they shared with me the reports that they publish annually. It was very comprehensive, fulsome, and available to all their members. Certainly there is no question that there are some great practices among our unions in terms of what they share.

However, I also think that this is important to point out, and this aligns with the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. For a government that claims it is concerned about transparency, why does it insist that people have to ask for the information? First nations transparency is such that first nations have to go to the band office, or they have to go begging to the government for basic information, if it is not provided willingly, and it is not always provided willingly.

• (1325)

For the union members, many organizations, but not all, are good about sharing that information. We can imagine how intimidating it would be for a member of a union to go in to ask for that information. This should be disclosed to union members.

If the Liberals care about transparency and do not want this going through the Canada Revenue Agency, why did they not amend it to say that it had to be made available online or make some other changes? Obviously, this is not about transparency, but about a promise they made to get support in the last election. If they had concerns with respect to the bill, they could have made changes to deal with those.

Bill C-525 is really about the right to a secret vote. We have had examples given here today, and I would like to provide an example.

I worked in a very small facility where there were 20 employees in total. Under the old system, if one of those 20 employees were interested in certifying a union, which was perfectly within his or her right to do, he or she could have talked to his or her 10 friends, they could have had a card check and hit their 51% and would have automatically been unionized without the other nine people even having a voice in that conversation. It is totally outrageous that 11 people could certify a union without the nine others having the ability to even have a say.

The secret ballot is not for the unions or the employer, but the employee. Members can imagine how divisive the whole idea of certification would be in this small setting of 20 people. The people who worked there did not want their name on the list among the 11 who wanted certification or among the nine who would ask for decertification. They wanted to have a secret ballot because they did not want the union to know and did not want their boss to know. Therefore, having a secret ballot is a fundamental democratic right.

I would again ask the members of the government how they can suggest not having a secret ballot on something that is so profound and so personal, and leaves people open to all sorts of difficult circumstances. I think that to move away from the secret ballot was an incredible mistake.

I look at British Columbia. It has had the secret ballot there for many years, which has not led to any catastrophic results, but to comfort for the worker. This was not about the employer or about the union, it was about the worker.

The government also likes to say that it made it harder to certify and easier to decertify. What it did was create an even threshold so that 50 plus one will certify or decertify a union. I do not think that is a very outrageous thing to do.

In conclusion, we have heard that one of the top priorities of the current government is to move away from transparency and whether to do so formally. I must give the Liberals their due, because right now it is being done formally as we have this chance to debate the bill and hold the government to account, whereas on the First Nations Transparency Act we heard them talk in question period about how a law is a law is a law. However, to them a law is only a law if they like it. If they do not like it, as was the case with the First Nations Transparency Act, they will not enforce it. Therefore, I think they have put themselves in a really difficult position.

I am delighted to stand up and talk to this, but I am disappointed that if the Liberals had concerns, they did not just make this better but are instead choosing to gut it.

• (1330)

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member admits that other organizations like medical associations, legal associations, and churches perhaps should have been included, and yet they were not included. Only unions were included.

How can the hon. member state that the bill was not in fact targeted at the labour movement?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, the bill could easily have added a nursing association or a bar association.

I think it is absolutely absurd. We had a private member's bill that was presented. We looked at it. If we recall the rules of private members' business, we cannot make dramatic changes. We can make amendments, but we cannot make dramatic changes.

Again, if that was important to the Liberals, they should have added it. They should not have taken it away.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member suggested that Bill C-377 is no big deal because it simply replicates something that exists south of the border.

Before the people of Regina—Lewvan elected me to this House, I worked as an economist for the United Steelworkers Union, which was indeed subject to disclosure requirements through the U.S. Department of Labor. I am here to tell the House that those went nowhere near as far as Bill C-377, which requires unions to disclose and account for every transaction over \$5,000.

Could the hon. member say that there would be any business in her riding or anywhere else in the country that would be prepared to comply with that sort of onerous administrative paperwork requirement?

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Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, as part of the process, when the finance committee looked at the bill, we looked at the reports that were provided through, I think, IRS. We went online. To be quite frank, they were very fulsome, they were very detailed, and in actual fact in many cases, required more.

I have to remind the member that there were changes made that changed the initial bill to what it ultimately became. When he stands up and asks questions about the bill, he has to look at it in terms of the ultimate bill that was passed by this House.

• (1335)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a secret ballot is an act of democracy, and by removing it, we are giving a yield of comfort to union leaders, not to workers.

Does the member agree that Bill C-4 is the repealing of an act of transparency and accountability that we provided and introduced in the previous government?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my comments, absolutely the most egregious part of the bill is removing the secret ballot.

I gave my example of 20 people with a certification drive, how personal the decision was, and how divisive it became. The fact that there was a secret ballot in this particular case, because it was under the B.C. labour code, was absolutely critical for the health of the workplace.

It is not about the employer. It is not about the union. It is about the worker.

[Translation]

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member from the opposition party that our government was strongly opposed to this bill because it was not transparent and it was unfair to Canada's workers. We made an election promise about it that was in our platform.

To us on this side of the House, keeping our word is key to who we are as a party and that is why we are in government today.

Does my colleague agree that keeping our promises to Canadians is important to our party?

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I cannot help myself. If I look at the government and its election promises, it is absolutely a ridiculous question.

I can start with a number of promises that the Liberals have broken: the revenue-neutral tax cut, broken; \$10-billion deficit, broken. I could go on and on. To suggest that they all of a sudden have this desire and need to make sure they keep a promise that is not in the best interests of the worker is a little hard to believe.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, throughout the past two decades there has been a steady attack on the rights of working people in Canada. Nowhere has this attack been more evident than on organized labour.

Having spent nearly a decade fighting the attack by the former Conservative government, the NDP welcomes the Liberal government's decision to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. Today, I am

proud to stand in the House in support of Bill C-4, a bill that would restore unions' rights to represent their members and to ensure that labour relations are respected.

In the last Parliament, despite public warnings from Canada's Privacy Commissioner, constitutional experts, and the Canadian Bar Association that these bills were very likely to be found unconstitutional, Bill C-377 became law anyway. Bill C-377 placed onerous, redundant, privacy-violating reporting burdens on unions.

Unions were already required to make their financial information available to all their members. While pushed under the guise of transparency, this sweeping bill would have had far-reaching consequences.

For example, anyone who took on a temporary contract with a union and was paid more than \$5,000 would see their name disclosed on this database. Likewise, any company engaging in work with a union, such as a small business providing snow removal services, would see their company and the contract details posted publicly, potentially undermining their ability to negotiate other contracts. Let me say that in Ottawa, it snows quite a lot.

By the way, this ideological attack on unions did not come without a price tag. The parliamentary budget officer estimated that the Canada Revenue Agency would need approximately \$21 million to establish this electronic database over the first two years and approximately \$2.1 million per year to keep the database up to date and to maintain after that. That means repealing Bill C-377 would save Canadian taxpayers and unions millions of dollars per year.

With the passage of Bill C-4, we now would have the opportunity to put that money to better use, to protect Canada's rights as well as access to government services.

Some of my constituents struggle daily to make ends meet, even with a full-time job, some of them with multiple jobs. Others would like to work, but cannot access the workforce for a variety of reasons including their inability to secure affordable, quality child care. The savings from this could fund a number of much needed programs such as social housing, services for seniors, and programs for the most vulnerable.

Like Bill C-377, Bill C-525 was designed to weaken unions in Canada. It was a bill that aimed to solve a problem that in my opinion, did not really exist.

Bill C-525 amended the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employee and Staff Relations Act, and the Public Service Labour Relations Act in order to make it more difficult to certify a union and much easier to decertify one.

Prior to this bill, in order to trigger a union certification vote within the workplace, between 35% and 50% of the employees would have to sign a card indicating that they wish to become members of the union. Bill C-525 would have seen this threshold raised to 40%. Let me make it very clear, prior to Bill C-525, if 35% of employees signed a card, it only triggered a workplace vote, it did not automatically certify a union.

Government Orders

In order to certify a union during the card signing process, more than 50% of employees would still need to have signed a card indicating that they wished to be a member of the union. Their rights were respected and the process was legitimate. For workplaces that were already unionized, Bill C-525 attempted to make decertification of a union easier.

Bill C-525 would lower the threshold required to trigger a decertification vote to 40%. With these measures, it is clear to me that the attempt here was to make it more difficult to trigger certification and for simply ideological reasons.

● (1340)

New Democrats have long supported Canadians' right to freedom of assembly, as protected under the charter, as well as defending the value of the labour movement to working Canadians. It is no coincidence that as unionized rates in Canada have fallen, good-paying, stable, full-time jobs have gone with them. Collective bargaining has played an important role throughout history in ensuring that workers' rights are protected, that workers work in a safe environment, and receive fair pay and benefits for the value they bring to the workforce.

As these stable, secure jobs have been eroded in the workplace, what remain in Canada now are precarious ones, temporary contracts, and part-time work, which often are without benefits and have lower pay. Those are becoming the norm in today's workplaces. Just last year it was found that 52%, or over half, of all workers in Toronto, a major city in Canada, are in these precarious employment situations. Across Canada, these precarious positions are also disproportionately held by visible minorities and new Canadians, adding another barrier to their moving up the socio-economic ladder and achieving financial security for themselves and their families.

For a growing number of precarious workers, making ends meet is becoming increasingly difficult as the cost of living continues to rise and their wages do not keep up. Statistics Canada found that the lowest-earning 20% of Canadian households are now spending over 51% of their take-home pay just to cover essentials. Housing costs alone are now taking up nearly one-third of 20% of Canadian households' paycheques.

The impact of precarious work goes beyond the chequebook. Workers in precarious jobs are nearly twice as likely to report worse mental health than those in secure positions. The impact on people not knowing when their next shift is, of being subject to last-minute scheduling, and not knowing if they will still have jobs next month can lead to acute stress, poor nutrition, and weight gain. Studies have also shown now that workers are becoming trapped in precarious situations instead of moving on to stable, permanent positions. It is increasingly evident that they are stuck, going from contract to contract.

Employment instability, lower wages, and the lack of benefits have far-reaching impacts on Canadians and the economy. Poverty among seniors hit a historic low of under 4% in 1995 and that figure has begun to reverse as workplace pension benefits are eroded and Canadians struggle to save for retirement.

In 2013, poverty rates among seniors increased slightly to 11%. Poverty among seniors disproportionately impacts women, who are now experiencing poverty at the unacceptable rate of 30%. However, do not take the NDP or labour's word for it. Unionization was a key driving force in the past in addressing these issues. Indeed, in a study released just last year, the International Monetary Fund signalled a significant shift in approach, acknowledging that the role unions have historically played in addressing income inequality in society around the globe has been understated.

Research bodies are now showing that declining unionization rates are a significant factor in increasing inequality, especially among developed nations, including Canada. The IMF has now stated that the declining presence of unions has not only weakened the earnings and earnings potential of low- and middle-income earners, but that this has directly led to the rapidly increasing income share of the very highest earners, in particular, corporate managers and shareholders. Unions in Canada play a key role in the financial security of working Canadians and this can no longer be denied.

The Liberal government's decision to repeal these ideological pieces of legislation that would further harm the Canadian labour movement and the financial security of working Canadians is a welcome first step, but there is more to be done. The NDP will continue to push the government to repeal division 20 of Bill C-59 on sick leave, to reinstate a federal minimum wage, and to enact anti-scab legislation and proactive pay equity legislation. New Democrats will push for the repeal of the former Bill C-4, instead of being satisfied with just the current promise to review it. This legislation is also likely to be found unconstitutional and was another example of ideologically driven legislation to undermine fair collective bargaining.

Canadians can be assured that the NDP will continue to fight for workplace rights and against growing income inequality in Canada. Reducing inequality and improving the financial security of everyday working Canadians needs to be a top priority for the government.

● (1345)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the comments shared with the House.

I will build on a couple of the points the member brought forward, and this is more of a comment than a question. The misnomer that the Conservatives continue to perpetuate this big union boss is really a fallacy. Many years back I was a former union member. I know the member's party has a number of former union leaders who are now in the House.

Government Orders

The reality of being involved in organized labour is that the strength is in the membership. In my home province of Nova Scotia, twice we have seen negotiating teams, for example, come to an agreement with the government, the NSGEU, the teachers union. They sat down and negotiated a deal. They brought it back to the membership, but the membership said no, that it was not the deal it wanted. The strength lies in the membership.

The member might want to comment on the fact that the whole thing about the big union bosses is far over-trumped by the former government.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, indeed, in every union, the rank and file do have a say. They present their position to their duly elected representatives. I know the Conservative members would like to deem them as the union big bosses, but in reality they are duly elected by their membership to represent them and to bring forward their voices. That is the case for every union in our country.

In that sense, the grassroots of the membership is represented by its duly elected leadership, and the job of the leadership is to bring forward its membership voice on behalf of the members.

• (1350)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member just spoke about the unions being all about the membership, and the rank and file. How can she defend taking away the right to a secret ballot as being respectful to that rank and file membership?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, as we know, in terms of certification, the members sign a card, and that is their voice. When they reach the percentage that is required, then the workplace becomes unionized.

I will give the member an example. This is a real experience by my mother, who is now retired. When we emigrated to Canada so many years ago, my mom worked as a farm worker, making \$10 a day. We did not know about unions, labour rights or anything like that. She worked long hours, and she made \$10 a day to support a family of eight.

She later on graduated from that work, after two years, and became a minimum wage earner as a dishwasher in a restaurant. She worked hard and long hours as well. There was an attempt to unionize at that restaurant. My mother, who did not speak very much English, signed the card but understood the essence of what it meant and what was explained to her. Soon after the manager found out. Other employees who spoke better English were under threat, and there were real challenges. Ultimately, it collapsed because everybody feared for their jobs.

There are real issues in terms of intimidation with respect to that. When members of a workforce sign a card, and they sign it with the information of what the consequences are and what they hope to achieve in their workforce, that should be sufficient when it reaches the threshold to unionize a workplace.

What are unions for? They are there to protect workers, to ensure they have better working conditions. That is what it means. I think we all want to strive for that for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-4, which is an exciting first step towards restoring the balance of power between unionized workers and employers.

The bill would amend the Canada Labour Code, the Public Service Labour Relations Act, and the Income Tax Act. The NDP supports all stages of this bill, which will repeal the bad Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. By the way, I want to commend my colleague, the member for Saskatoon West, for her work on this bill. She demonstrated how important it is to repeal these two bad bills.

We had mentioned that these two Conservative bills were unconstitutional and constituted an invasion of privacy, among other things. Nevertheless, the Conservatives pushed these bills, which offered nothing good for Canadian workers.

Bill C-377 amended the Income Tax Act to require that labour organizations and labour trusts provide information returns to the minister for public disclosure. This bill required all union organizations to submit detailed annual financial reports on salaries, revenues, and spending.

The Privacy Commissioner, Daniel Therrien, said that Bill C-377 went too far and constituted an invasion of privacy. The Canadian Bar Association also questioned whether the bill was constitutional and even said that this bill would infringe on freedom of expression and freedom of association provisions. It was, therefore, a very bad bill. Unfortunately, the Conservatives continued to push this bill, even though almost everyone agreed that it was a very bad piece of legislation.

This reminds us of the need to protect collective bargaining and the right of unions to strike. We need to believe in the rights of unions and the important role they play in striking a balance of power between employers and workers. When unions are valued, workers have more rights and there is less pay disparity. A strong union presence has its benefits in a society.

That being said, the Conservatives introduced another bad bill, Bill C-525, which sought to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, and the Public Service Labour Relations Act. In short, this bad Conservative bill was based on bad American laws that are increasingly geared at doing away with unions.

Under the bill, workers in the same union would be allowed to be members without making a financial contribution to the union's activities and without losing the benefits afforded to them under the collective agreement. That does not make any sense. It goes against union promotion. If fewer people paid union dues, it would upset the balance of power that allows workers to assert their rights.

The purpose of these legislative initiatives is to limit unions' financial capacity by making it easier for workers to opt out of union membership while continuing to take advantage of the benefits afforded to them under their collective agreement. This was yet another bad decision by the Conservatives.

Government Orders

•(1355)

I am truly very happy because the NDP worked so hard that the Liberals followed its lead. I am very proud of my party and our leadership in that regard. I am pleased that the Liberals are on the same page.

In Drummond, I regularly meet people who belong to a union. I recently met two members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Many workers in my riding are protected by this union. These people told me that they were concerned about what we have seen in recent years, and that is the erosion of workers' rights. They also shared with me what they would like to see happen. For example, they would like workers to continue to have the right to collective bargaining. Unfortunately, the Conservatives imposed working conditions by passing legislation rather than by negotiating with workers.

I believe that the Liberals understand that it is important to negotiate instead. I will come back to that.

Occupational health and safety under the Canada Labour Code has been eroded. Workers are very concerned about occupational health and safety problems and would like to prevent them. We are very proud to see that the Liberals have begun to look at this issue. They are tackling Bill C-59, which was introduced by the Conservatives. We want to repeal the bill, and the Liberal government is going to submit a proposal to the union.

Bill C-59 contained a provision that would abolish employees' right to good faith bargaining by authorizing the employer to unilaterally establish all sick leave conditions. There was a problem related to sick leave, and instead of negotiating the Conservatives imposed a law. Fortunately, the Liberals will negotiate instead. However, they have unfortunately brought forward the same proposal the Conservatives did. We are somewhat disappointed with that.

I also attended several general annual meetings of the union representing workers at the Drummondville penitentiary. I salute all the workers of the Drummondville penitentiary, who do an excellent job. I had the opportunity to visit the institution a number of times. The penitentiary's needs in terms of the rehabilitation of inmates, who want to eventually leave and return to society, are incredible. I am sure that this is the case for all other penitentiaries in Canada. I visited a continuing education class and there were other initiatives as well. I was very pleased to be able to visit them, and I would like to thank them for welcoming me.

I would also like to remind my colleagues that the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie worked very hard in committee in the last Parliament to fight Bill C-377. I think that it is very important to acknowledge his contribution, because he did an incredible job.

Of course we are pleased and delighted that Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 are being repealed. However, we in the NDP will continue to pressure the government to enhance the right to collective bargaining and make working conditions more equitable for all Canadians. We will continue to pressure the government to repeal division 20 of Bill C-59 on sick leave, reinstate the federal minimum wage, and pass the anti-scab legislation introduced yesterday by my colleague from Jonquière. That is a fantastic

initiative, and we are all really proud of the collective work done by the NDP when it comes to protecting workers' rights.

I hope the bill passes unanimously in this Parliament, because it will restore the balance of power between workers and employers. I commend the NDP for the collective work it has done, which inspired the Liberal government, and I congratulate the Liberal government for moving in the right direction on this, although there is still work to be done.

•(1400)

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is probably my last opportunity to speak on the bill at second reading, so I would like to ask my hon. colleague this. In his joy to undo my private member's bill, C-525, does he think that as a member of Parliament in the next federal election, if he chooses to run again, he should be able to go to the doorstep of a Canadian household, have the voters come out and be able to demand that they sign or vote or cast their ballot on that doorstep, right in front of him, right when he wants them to?

Does he think that is democracy, because that is exactly what Bill C-4 would do. He is going to undo the right to a secret ballot vote, which is what Bill C-525 enabled. Does he think that is an improvement to democracy, because that what he is advocating?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide a bit of context for what has been happening over the past few years and what has been confirmed by a number of economic stakeholders. I am referring to the increase in inequality throughout North America and here in Canada in particular.

Inequality continues to grow, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain union certification. There needs to be a balance of power. The current way of doing things is working quite well. There have not been any major complaints.

We therefore need to ensure that when bills are introduced, they are constitutional and they respect privacy. Bill C-377, for example, was a total failure on both counts. I am very proud that my party initiated the fight against these two terrible bills that upset the balance of power and violate workers' rights.

We need strong unions to be able to continue to promote better protection for workers' rights and better access to decent wages. As a result, I am very proud that the Liberals introduced these two measures to repeal these two terrible bills.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing. My colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe asked a very important and simple question, then we had a response that just completely ignored the question, as if it had never been asked.

Government Orders

Maybe I will try again, as the member perhaps did not hear. Given that members of the House of Commons are elected through a secret ballot, given that elections occur at every level via secret ballot, does the member not believe it is sensible that working men and women who are considering certification of union have the same rights in that context as everyone else has?

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question my hon. colleague asked earlier, namely whether I was prepared to go door-to-door in my riding. I will keep going door-to-door and not just during the next election campaign. I will go door-to-door in the coming months because it is very important to hear what our constituents have to say.

When I knock on doors and I welcome workers at home, they all tell me that these two bills are harmful to workers and the fight against inequality, and that they put up roadblocks to improving conditions for the middle class, while preventing people from joining the middle class.

I will very proudly go knocking on doors again to see my constituents and tell them that we worked very hard to ensure that these two bills were repealed. Again, I congratulate the Liberals for the work they have done on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have certainly heard a lot of questions from the Conservative side about Bill C-525 and how we are not supporting secret ballots and all that, but what I do not hear from that side of House is discussion of Bill C-377. In my mind that was the more onerous piece of legislation. The way it tied up unions in knots, it really did seek to kneecap them and their ability to organize workers.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comments on that particular piece of legislation and how it was a direct attack on the labour movement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I would like to say that I received a lot of mail and email when Bill C-377 was introduced. People told me what a terrible bill it was and said that it violated not only privacy, but also constitutional rights, in several ways.

That is why we are so proud of what is happening. I want to reiterate this because I know that my hon. colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie did excellent work not only in committee, but also in consulting people across Canada. He fought very hard and represented the rights of workers everywhere. We are very pleased that our work is paying off. That is really something we want to emphasize again.

Congratulations to the Liberals for recognizing the importance of repealing these two bills.

The Deputy Speaker: Since no more members wish to speak, pursuant to order made Thursday, February 25, 2016, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion for second reading of Bill C-4 are deemed put, and a recorded division is deemed requested and deferred until Monday, March 7, 2016, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

[*English*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you were to seek it, I am sure you would find consent to see the clock at 2:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 7 at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:08 p.m.)

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