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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 9, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 9, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)
[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-38, An Act to amend An Act to amend the Criminal Code (exploitation and trafficking in persons).

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

* * *

STRENGTHENING MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY FOR CANADIANS ACT

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (for the Minister of Transport) moved that Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-230, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (drug-impaired driving).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise in the House today to introduce my first bill as the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, Bill S-230, an act to amend the Criminal Code (drug-impaired driving), which was first introduced by Senator Claude Carignan.

This bill authorizing police officers to use a screening device to detect drug-impaired driving will save many lives. I am asking all of my colleagues to set partisanship aside and support this bill as it moves through the legislative process in the House of Commons.

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

•(1005)
[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table, in both official languages, the charter statement on Bill C-38, An Act to amend An Act to amend the Criminal Code (exploitation and trafficking in persons).

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you were to seek it, I think you would find that there is consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division requested and deferred to Tuesday, February 14, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to present four petitions and I will do so expeditiously.

I have one petition from residents in my riding who call on the House of Commons to recognize animals as not mere property, but to move animal cruelty crimes out of the property section of the Criminal Code, as other attempts have been made in this place.

Business of Supply

FALUN GONG

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from hundreds and hundreds of residents primarily in the GTA, who call on the Government of Canada to make it clear to the People's Republic of China that the persecution of practitioners of Falun Dafa and Falun Gong must end.

SHARK FINNING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is to the issue of the transport and export and import of shark fins, endangering many species of sharks globally. This is another issue that has come up before the House and we need to revisit it.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, lastly, from residents in the Vancouver area, there is a call for a tanker ban to prevent the movement of tankers loaded with a substance that cannot be cleaned up, namely bitumen mixed with diluent, for the entire west coast of British Columbia.

ABORTION

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of my riding of Whitby and of the greater Durham region, in response to recent anti-choice protests that many residents have found distressing.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if a supplementary response to Question No. 674, originally tabled on January 30, could be made into an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 674—**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:**

With regard to relocation costs for exempt staff moving to a location outside of the National Capital Region, since January 1, 2016: (a) what is the total cost paid by the government for relocation services and hotel stays related to moving these staff to a location outside of the National Capital Region; and (b) for each individual reimbursement, what is the (i) total payout, (ii) cost for moving services, (iii) cost for hotel stays?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—COMMITMENTS REGARDING ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government misled Canadians on its platform and Throne Speech commitment “that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system”, and that the House call on the government to apologize to Canadians for breaking its promise.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague and friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, which is great because I know he has some very interesting things to tell us.

Today is an important day because we are here to discuss campaign promises the Liberal Party made less than a year and a half ago.

In their election platform, on their website, during press conferences, in press releases, and during the debates, the Liberals made several commitments. They promised many things to many people. They promised a lot of money, they promised many reforms, and they promised a great deal of renewal. One of the fundamental aspects of this democratic renewal, this political renewal, was a firm and solemn commitment to change our electoral system, to change our voting system. The Liberals repeated dozens of times that the 2015 election would be the last election using the current voting system, that is, the first past the post system.

Why? Because it is an unfair and unjust system that creates major distortions between the will of the people, what people choose to vote for when they put their ballot in the ballot box, and the result we end up with here, in the House, with 338 MPs. These distortions are so severe that they are putting people off voting altogether, because they feel as though their vote does not count, their voice is not being represented, and their vote is wasted.

The Liberals campaigned on making every vote count. Actually, the Liberals, the NDP, and the Greens all campaigned to change our voting system, to make it reflect what people really want. The results of the 2015 election revealed that 18 million ballots were cast. Nine million of those votes actually elected a member, and the other nine million did not elect anyone. People sense that, even if they do not necessarily know the exact figures. Sometimes when a riding is won ahead of time by a Liberal or Conservative candidate, people wonder why they should even bother voting, since their vote will not count or change anything.

Under a new electoral system, we could ensure that a party that receives roughly 10% of the votes would have roughly 10% of the seats in the House, and a party that receives 20% of the votes would have 20% of the seats. That is how it works in most of the democracies similar to ours. That is how it works in 85% of the OECD countries.

Canada is one of the last and few countries to use the archaic first past the post voting system. Under this system, in a race of three or four candidates, the winner can be elected to the House with 28%, 30%, or 32% of the votes. In other words, 70% of the people who voted in that riding did not vote for the member who got elected. That is where the distortion is most evident.

The last Conservative government won a majority with 39% of the votes, which means that 61% of Canadians and Quebeckers did not vote for that government, but had to tolerate a Conservative majority for four years.

In 2015, the Liberal Party won 39% of the votes, 55% of the seats in the House, and nearly 100% of the power. Is that really democratic? I do not think so and neither do most Canadians who were consulted on this.

Let us not forget that the Liberals made a solemn promise to change the voting system, to change our electoral system. They made that promise not only during the election campaign, but also in their throne speech, which is not insignificant. It was written in the mandate letter of the first minister of democratic institutions and they repeated it time and again in the House and outside the House, at every town hall and public gathering that the first minister of democratic institutions asked us to hold.

● (1010)

Moreover, more than 200 members of the House held town hall meetings on this subject and, at many of them, Liberal members reiterated their promise to change the electoral system and the voting process.

The new Minister of Democratic Institutions was one of them. Last June, she was taking exception to the unfair nature of the first past the post system. However, six months later, she suddenly flip-flopped and completely changed her tune, as did the entire government.

Members of the House and voters expect more, particularly from the Liberal Party, which promised during the election campaign that it would restore Canadians' trust in our institutions, give Canadians renewed hope, counter cynicism, and ensure that our democratic institutions are truly representative.

On December 7, in response to a question posed by the member for Outremont in the House, the Prime Minister repeated that the 2015 general election would be the last one conducted under the first past the post voting system. He said that on December 7.

On December 2, the Prime Minister reaffirmed his commitment to electoral reform by saying, and I quote: "I make promises because I believe in them...I've heard loudly and clearly that Canadians want a better system of governance, a better system of choosing our governments, and I'm working very hard so that 2015 is indeed the last election under first-past-the-post."

He added, "can't expect us to throw up our hands when things are a little difficult...that's not the way I was raised..."

I would like to repeat what my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley said. As a child, I learned that if I make a promise, I keep it. If

Business of Supply

I do not, I apologize. That is what the NDP motion is asking the government to do.

If the Liberals said they were going to do something, repeated it, and made people believe it, if they were looking for voters and convinced them to put their trust in the Liberals, and then they just scrap the plan, they have to apologize. Every Liberal member here should apologize to the House and to all Canadians for misleading them. This is serious.

We are giving the Liberals an opportunity to have a clear conscience and to officially apologize for breaking a fundamental promise that affects our democracy, namely the representation of citizens in their Parliament.

People tell us that they will never vote Liberal again. Who could blame them? I could see how voters would feel alienated for a lot less. The worst part is that young people believed in the hope those Liberal promises generated in 2015 and voted for the first time in their lives thinking they were going to change the system and make our democracy better.

Now their trust is disintegrating. They tell us they will not be tricked again, they will never vote again. That is a crying shame because those people are the reason cynicism is going strong, particularly among youth who thought these politicians were different but are now realizing they make all kinds of promises, just like old-guard Liberals.

Nevertheless, there has been pushback. People are reacting. Last week, an online petition calling on the Liberal government to keep its promise had a few thousand signatures. With 500 signatures being added every hour this past week, it now has almost 93,000.

New Democrats will never surrender, will never give up the fight for a good voting system in which every vote counts, every person is represented, and the will of the people triumphs.

● (1015)

The Liberals dangled this promise in front of everyone, and then they broke it. Now they have to pay the price. For our part, we will continue fighting for a better democracy.

[English]

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

Mr. Speaker, I would indicate for the member that I was here, as was he, when the Fair Elections Act was brought before this Parliament. I sat and listened to many of the meetings of the procedure and House affairs committee. One thing that I noticed, and I am sure the member would agree, is that there was a great desire to improve the system. Through this Prime Minister and the minister responsible, we have witnessed people saying there are many things we can do to improve the Canada Elections Act. I suspect that over the coming while, whether through the procedures and House affairs committee or the minister, we will hear of the ways we can improve the system.

At the very least, does the member recognize that there are things we can do to improve our system, which will allow Canadians to feel confident that we are moving forward on changing the way Canadians vote? A good example of that would be the voter ID card.

Business of Supply

•(1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I do appreciate how uncomfortable this must make the Liberal Party spokesperson for this broken promise.

The Liberals could at least recognize that a consensus did emerge on the committee struck by the government. The committee produced a report that stated that Canadians should be consulted through a referendum on a proportional system based on certain standards. That is the consensus.

Of the experts we heard from, 90% said that a proportional system is the best way to go, and 88% of ordinary Canadians who came to see us said the same thing. When we hosted town hall meetings, as the Liberals asked us to do, people told us they wanted a proportional system. In addition, in the parliamentary committee's online survey, 72% of respondents said they wanted a proportional system. That sounds like a consensus to me.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the NDP for bringing this motion forward. If we asked the government to explain itself, and if we had a vote every time it broke an electoral promise, we might not do anything else in this place. There is a website that is tracking the broken promises of the current government, which is up to 23 significant broken promises from the election that was held just 15 months ago.

I want to ask the member this. He and the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley were singled out by Gerald Butts after this decision came out. Gerald Butts is the most powerful person, elected or not, in the PMO. He said this member ran on an electoral promise of balancing the budget, so obviously that is similar to the Liberal Party breaking a promise to change the electoral system. Could the member talk about the bizarre nature of the response from the PMO following this clear broken promise?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

With respect to the attack by the Prime Minister's chief of staff, I would simply say that it is sometimes an honour to be a target. I do not have a problem with that because it means that we have done a good job.

I would also like to point out that my colleague is quite right about the government's broken promises piling up, whether it is home mail delivery, or Bill C-51, or the small deficit promised by the Liberals during the election campaign.

However, when it comes to our democratic institutions and how people vote, these are fundamental elements of our identity as a society that expects promises to be kept.

Today, people realize that they can no longer take the Liberals at their word. They are saying that if the Liberals can break this promise, they are capable of breaking the next promises they make.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saannich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP for having this very important debate today. I share

my colleague's concern regarding the growing cynicism caused by this broken promise.

[*English*]

Does the member agree with me that it is not too late to still repair the damage and find a way forward based on the committee report?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Green Party for her question.

I would like to acknowledge her continued hope that it is possible to improve our system. I would like the Liberal members to share this hope, because they promised Canadians that they would improve our electoral system. I am asking them to keep their promise and to make the change that people wanted and that they voted for by putting them in office. Otherwise, this will increase voters' cynicism to the point that it will cause irreparable harm to our democracy in future years.

•(1025)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent and tireless work. I also thank members in the House, who took the Prime Minister on his word, in good faith, and consulted with all of their constituents about this most fundamental issue: how we vote and how we elect governments. I know many colleagues on all sides held town halls and consultations of various sorts.

I would like to start my comments today with a quote from the Prime Minister himself, who just a couple of months ago, said the following:

The fact is that Canadians expect that when someone behaves in a way that isn't consistent with their expectations of themselves, or Canadians' expectations of them, that they apologize.

I would argue that the expectation that Canadians had of the Prime Minister, the expectation that he placed on himself, was that he would be different, that when he made a commitment, he would keep it, that when he made a promise, it meant something to him.

Let us listen to what he had to say about his promises. He stated:

Canadians elect governments to do hard things and don't expect us to throw up our hands when things are a little difficult... No, I'm sorry, that's not the way I was raised. That's not the way I'm going to move forward on a broad range of issues, regardless of how difficult they may seem at a given point.

What was he talking about? He was talking about electoral reform. In December of this past year, he was talking about his commitment to electoral reform, which was as clear and as black and white as any promise that the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party made, not just during the campaign but repeated in the throne speech and repeated literally hundreds of times since. In those town halls that the Prime Minister held across the country, not in British Columbia, strangely enough, but across much of the country, when asked about electoral reform and his commitment, he put his hand on his heart, looked into the eyes of Canadians, and said he was deeply committed to it and they could bank on the promise that 2015 will be last election under first past the post.

Business of Supply

One would think when the prime minister of a country says something, Canadians ought to believe it. They should have enough faith in that prime minister's integrity that, when he repeats a promise again and again with such great sincerity and emotion, it would mean something. If it does not, then it is that very cynicism to which the Prime Minister promised to be the antidote. He said that cynicism is killing our democracy, that people "lost faith" in the Harper government because it broke its promises. "We must and we will do better". The Prime Minister stated that. The very cynicism he meant to be the antidote of, he is now being a new source of, for Canadians, particularly young Canadians.

I want to make this point. In the last election and since, many young Canadians were excited by the campaign the Prime Minister ran, because he said he was different, that he talks differently, thinks differently about issues, thinks like young Canadians, and that politics can be better, that the days of old Liberal leaders who would say one thing to get elected and then, once they were in office, realized that it would work for them to break their promises and that they could, without any consequences.

The lesson we have today in this motion is the simplest one. It is the one that we all learned as children and the one that we all, hopefully, teach our children. It is that when we make a promise, we should do everything in our power to keep it, and that if we break the promise, we should apologize. We should admit that it is broken and apologize, and then work our tail off to restore and regain the trust that has been lost.

This should not be hard for some of my Liberal colleagues, because they have already taken a couple of steps with their constituents, with open letters saying they apologize. "I apologize; we made a promise and we broke the promise", say some of my Liberal colleagues. That is a good thing to do, to admit they made a mistake. Denial is a river in Egypt. Liberals cannot deny this one, and some of them have chosen not to.

We have not heard the Prime Minister apologize yet, which is strange to me, because it was he who made that commitment, he who broke that promise. Yet he did not find the courage to be the one to stand in this Parliament and tell Canadians, "Oh, by the way, all that good faith you placed in me, all those town halls you engaged in, that painful online survey, MyDemocracy.ca, that you suffered through, all of that was actually cynical". All of that was some attempt to muddy the waters and arrive at this bizarre conclusion that the broad consensus that the Liberals invented halfway through the process, which is now required, does not exist. Some 333 pages from the electoral reform committee put truth to that lie.

● (1030)

The committee was able to listen to experts and listen to evidence. Was that not another promise from the Liberals? It was going to be an evidence-based government. Overwhelmingly, my Conservative colleagues, my Bloc colleagues, and my friend from the Green Party, everybody, paid attention. They realized that of all the experts who came forward, 90% said that if we were going to change the system, proportional was the one we should put on offer.

Eight-six per cent of average Canadians who showed up at the open mikes wrote to the committee. They completed our own survey, which had the audacity to ask questions like whether they would like

to change the electoral system in Canada. It was a question the Liberals forgot to ask in theirs. It asked, if they would like to change it, what kind of system they were interested in.

Canadians were somehow able to handle those tough, mind-boggling questions; 23,000 of them responded to the committee and had no problem with them. There was no scandal.

The Liberals spent \$4 million on their consultation process. The consensus is there. The only people who could not get consensus were my Liberal colleagues. Why? As the Prime Minister was breaking his promise, he told Canadians why. He has a preferred electoral system. Never mind that at the committee, there was no evidence to support his alternative vote, alternative facts, system, the system that says we will rank them.

The committee heard from Canadians and from experts that if we are trying to make every vote count, if we are trying to make the system of voting in Canada fairer, the alternative vote makes the problems in our current system worse, so we should not do it.

As the Prime Minister and his office, his "brain trust", realized, when they said change the voting system, they wanted to change it their way. When they went out and consulted with Canadians in good faith, said the Liberals, they were sorry, but people did not give them the answer they were looking for.

Decision-based evidence-making is the new mantra coming from the Liberals. They are not going to use the evidence in front of them. If the evidence points in the wrong direction and might hurt Liberal prospects of having majority governments to the end of time, they will kill the entire process. If the Prime Minister's credibility takes a hit, well, he is very popular, he is a good-looking guy, and he will be able to survive this.

The Liberals said that people are not paying attention, that no one cares about this issue, about how we vote, or the Prime Minister's promise. There was a petition a Canadian asked me to endorse, and I said sure. It was an electronic petition. We have been doing them for a few years now in the House. Back in November, he read the Prime Minister's interview in *Le Devoir*.

The Prime Minister said that electoral reform was a big issue when it was Stephen Harper in office and Canadians were unhappy, but now they are happy, and therefore their interest in electoral reform is gone, because I am me, says the Prime Minister.

That Canadian heard that message and worried, properly, that the Liberals might be about to break their promise, so he sent us a petition. It did not get a lot of traction. A few thousand Canadians signed it online just a couple of weeks ago. Well, as of this morning, 92,500 Canadians have gone to the site and said, "Keep the promise. I like the promise. I want the promise".

Business of Supply

We have been hearing, particularly from Liberal supporters, when I have been on talk radio and in my inbox and on social media, some variance of total dismay. They thought this guy was different, or they are disgusted and say that this is exactly what they voted against. They did not want this anymore. They wanted something better, as the Prime Minister promised time and time again.

I will offer this. For those out there who say that Canadians did not wake up this morning concerned about mixed member proportional representation or STV, that this issue is too much in the weeds to matter in politics and that we have bigger issues to fight this day, this could very well be one of those forest fire issues. A lot of Canadians care about the integrity and the promise of a prime minister. They want to know they can trust it when he says it, and we cannot anymore.

This could be one of those forest fires that are the most dangerous kind. Although they burn bright and can be suppressed, and this happens in my region in British Columbia, when people think the fire is out and have moved on, actually it has gone into the roots. My friend from Prince George will know about these fires. These are the most dangerous, because they can pop up again at any time.

They burn so hot and burn so long. This will dog the government from now until the time it heads back to the polls and has the audacity to say that it did not tell the truth last time, it misled people, and it had other issues that were important, but now people can trust it again.

• (1035)

On my last point I would say this. In the current age we live in, with so much global uncertainty, with the rise of this populist and dangerous alt-right movement in the United States and in Europe, the very inoculation we need is a fair voting system. The irony is that a Prime Minister who was elected to diminish cynicism, to raise hope and expectations, and with the sacred bond and trust we have as elected people with those who elect us, is walking away from the very proposal that would inoculate this country against those very dangerous movements that are happening globally.

The Liberals must apologize. They must reconsider their decision, and they must do the right thing and keep their word. Canadians expect no less.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe there are many different ways we can change the Canada Elections Act that would allow more Canadians to participate and get engaged. I see that as positive.

I am hoping that through the debate today, we will actually hear ideas that go beyond that. No doubt the member will say there was no question, but I do not believe there was a consensus on this very important issue.

Does the member have any thoughts on other ways we can improve the system?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, one thing the Liberals could do that would be really easy is take this promise off Liberal.ca. It is still up there: “2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system”. Talk about tone deaf. The Liberals are leaving the deception on the website that the Prime Minister just

referenced earlier this week as he was making another promise about not taxing Canadians' health benefits. We remember the reaction the Prime Minister got when he said he made the promise and that it was on their website. The House of Commons laughed at him.

This is a terrible thing for a prime minister. We all have debates here, different points of view. That is fine, that is normal, but when it turns to mockery, when the words no longer mean anything, when the promises are held up and disregarded, that is when things turn. This is a dangerous game the Liberals are playing.

I expected my friend to at least apologize to his constituents in Winnipeg, because he campaigned on the same promise, which, by the way, is still sitting on their website.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think my friend is quite right to say that there are many Canadians for whom changes to the electoral system may not be a significant priority. However, I think for all Canadians, the integrity of government is a crucial priority. Even for those who may be very happy with the current system or who may have a range of other perspectives, they want to know that the government has integrity. That is obviously a big question essential to the discussion we are having today on this motion.

We had a promise that was indeed very clear, and it was not expressed in contingencies, such as if this happens and if that happens.

Can I ask the member to comment on the extensive cost of the consultations that were undertaken, ostensibly in a context where the government did not have any genuine intention of moving forward? It undertook these massive consultations. The same consultations could have been done on the jobs crisis we have in Alberta or on any number of pertinent economic issues, but instead, so much was spent in the way of time and resources on an issue it seems, in retrospect, the government did not have any serious intention of moving forward.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the current estimates of the bill so far for this ruse, this fake consultation process, is about \$4 million, give or take.

However, the consultation process was real. The town halls people engaged in, the online forums, and the discussions, all that was real. Canadians truly took part in that.

My friend said correctly that the integrity of the Prime Minister and of the government is essential to everybody, and this consensus that the Liberals claim does not exist, even though it does, is a strange bar they set on no other issue so far. Did they seek that same consensus on pipelines, cuts to health care, or any other broken promise? Did they say that they were making this decision because they believed there was a consensus on issue X? No, they went ahead.

Let me read one more quote. This was when he became Prime Minister of this country:

Business of Supply

Canadians are tired of the cynicism and mistrust that has characterized federal politics for far too long. They are ready to place their trust in government once again, but this will have a price. If we want Canadians to trust their government, the government must trust Canadians.

I agree with him. I just want him to do it. I want him to follow up those words with action. Is that so much to ask? That is what Canadians want too, by the way.

I look forward to the minister's comments, and hopefully she will find time in her speech to apologize, admit the promise was broken, and tell us her plan to fix the broken trust that has been established by the government.

• (1040)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to the motion by the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

This is an important debate. Many important affairs of state and issues that matter in the day-to-day lives of Canadians are debated thoughtfully in this chamber, but debating policies and ideas related to Canada's democratic institutions, to the very way we govern ourselves, are foundational to our democracy itself and are among the most important, and they should also be among the least partisan. That is what Canadians expect of their members of Parliament. Canadians want their parliamentarians to work with each other and to co-operate on policy. They want their government to be accountable. They want their MPs to act in the interests of their constituents.

Canadians also believe that major reforms to the electoral system should not be made if they lack broad support. We agree. That is why listening to Canadians is so important to us, to hear from Canadians about their democracy and to do all we can to make sure that as many Canadians as possible can participate in the conversation.

We entered the conversation a year ago with an open mind. We chose to listen to Canadians, to create opportunities for their voices, not ours and not narrow partisan interests, to dominate the discussion.

We said we would strike a parliamentary committee to study electoral reform, and we did. The all-party Special Committee on Electoral Reform was created in June 2016, and over the next six months, it dedicated itself to hearing from Canadians. There were 57 meetings, 196 witnesses, and 567 open-mic participants across Canada. Over 22,000 Canadians participated in the committee's online survey, and its thoughtful, detailed report was submitted to the House on December 1.

I have read this exhaustive, nuanced report. Great effort went into preparing this report, and I encourage every member of the House to read it.

[*Translation*]

The government listened to Canadians through its own concurrent consultations. Town halls and round tables were held in every province and territory last spring, summer, and fall. Thousands of Canadians took part and shared their views on our democratic values and other important issues related to Canadian democracy.

[*English*]

We encouraged members of Parliament to hold town halls in their own constituencies as well, and we are so thankful that so many hon. members did just that. Some members of the House even held more than one. I held one in my riding of Burlington, and I am grateful to the more than 90 residents who joined me at Mainway arena for a thoughtful discussion.

It is important to recognize that these town halls were held by members representing every party in the House: the Conservatives, such as the member for Sarnia—Lambton, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk, and the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes; the New Democratic Party, such as the member for Hamilton Centre; the Bloc Québécois, such as the member for Rivière-du-Nord; and the Green Party, represented by the leader, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

This process was non-partisan and important to members of all parties in the House.

[*Translation*]

The members of the official opposition presented a joint brief to the special committee. They decided to engage 81,000 Canadians in 59 ridings. They sent mail to their constituents, including polling data, a letter from their MP, and other documents. Members from the third party also presented a joint brief to the special committee.

According to that brief, 37,000 Canadians made comments about electoral reform through 40 town halls, telephone surveys, mail-in surveys, and petitions.

We hired Vox Pop Labs, who created MyDemocracy.ca, in order to give as many Canadians as possible the opportunity to take part in this conversation. We are extremely grateful to the more than 360,000 Canadians who took part. Whether by phone or online, Canadians from every province and territory accepted our invitation.

• (1045)

[*English*]

The consultations launched on electoral reform made it one of the largest and farthest-reaching consultations ever undertaken by the Government of Canada. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I thank those many thousands of Canadians. I thank them for spending the evening with their neighbours at town halls, because they wanted a chance to ask a question or share their opinion about our democracy.

I thank them for filling out an online survey, for taking the time to tell us what they believe. I thank them for getting involved, and for their honest participation. Their opinion matters, and their perspectives are valid.

Canadians have given us a lot to think about, and we will continue to respond to their concerns and perspectives. For example, Canadians shared their valuable ideas about online voting, mandatory voting, and how we can make voting more accessible for persons with disabilities. I am looking forward to formally responding to the special committee's report on these and other issues soon.

Business of Supply

Above all, we learned the passionate, personal connection Canadians have to their democratic institutions, and how important it is to them that the government and their members of Parliament focus on strengthening and protecting those institutions. That is exactly what we are going to do.

[Translation]

If we want to improve our country's democracy, we need to ensure that the political parties are more transparent when it comes to fundraising. We currently have strict federal legislation governing fundraising. Contributions from corporations and unions are banned. There is a limit for individual contributions and there are strict rules regarding lobbyists.

[English]

Our government intends to introduce legislation to make political fundraising more open and transparent. If passed, it would apply to fundraising events attended by the prime minister, cabinet ministers, party leaders, and leadership candidates.

[Translation]

These fundraising activities cannot be private events. They must be publicly announced. It is also important that these activities be transparent. After these types of events take place, the political parties and leadership candidates must quickly make information about them public.

I look forward to working with the members of every party to debate and discuss this legislation.

[English]

Our government will also take steps to protect the integrity of Canada's democracy by defending the Canadian electoral process from hacking and cyber-threats.

[Translation]

If the political parties' computer systems are hacked or compromised, it could jeopardize our democratic system. Political parties constitute vital democratic infrastructure.

We will ensure that Canada's democracy is better protected by helping the parties protect their information. We will ask the Communications Security Establishment to analyze the risk that Canada's political parties' computer systems could be hacked and to make the results of that analysis public. This plan will help us better protect Canada's democracy by helping the political parties protect themselves.

[English]

As well, CSE will reach out to political parties to share best practices on how to guard against hacking.

[Translation]

These new initiatives will build on the important work that our government is doing to strengthen our democracy. We introduced Bill C-33. If it is passed, we will break down barriers to voting and strengthen the integrity of our electoral system. We will also give more than a million Canadians living abroad the right to vote.

• (1050)

[English]

We are keeping our commitment to Canadians to bring this legislation forward, and listening to the Canadians who called on us to take this action.

If passed, Bill C-33 would restore the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to educate and inform Canadians, especially young people, indigenous Canadians, and new Canadians, about voting, elections, and related issues. Restoring the mandate that was in place prior to 2014 would allow public information and education programs for all Canadians. Studies show that the more electors know about their electoral system, the more likely they are to vote. We trust Elections Canada to help inform Canadians about their democracy.

While more youth voted in the 2015 election than ever before, we cannot take it for granted. Bill C-33, if passed, would provide Canadian youth from age 14 to 17 the ability to opt in to a new register as future electors, so that when they turn 18 they would already be registered to vote. Many countries around the world allow youth to preregister to vote. It is an opportunity to learn about our democratic process and would promote democratic engagement among our future generations.

Bill C-33 represents positive, progressive reform to the way we vote. There are many examples that highlight our dedication and commitment to improving and strengthening our democracy within Bill C-33. I hope I can count on all members of this House to support our legislation.

I will leave members with one more example.

Statistics Canada found that an estimated 172,700 electors did not vote in the 2015 election because of a lack of adequate identity documents. The lack of these documents disproportionately affects groups with traditionally low participation rates, such as seniors, youth, indigenous Canadians, Canadians with disabilities, and the homeless.

Vouching is one way that we can reduce barriers and include more Canadians in our democracy. Our government committed to making voting more accessible, and if passed, Bill C-33 would deliver on the commitment by restoring vouching.

[Translation]

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is continuing to examine the recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer following the 2015 election. As I said earlier this week when I appeared before the committee, I recognize the work that the committee members are doing and I look forward to reading the committee's report.

Business of Supply

[English]

As the Minister of Democratic Institutions, I will also work on recommending options to create an independent commissioner to organize political party leaders debates, reviewing the limits of the amounts political parties and third parties can spend during elections, proposing measures to ensure that spending between elections is subject to reasonable limits, as well as supporting the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Justice in reviewing the Access to Information Act. I am confident that members share a desire to work on these important matters with us.

I will also continue to work with all members of this House on Senate reform. We have already introduced new measures and reforms for Canadians, including the non-partisan, merit-based Senate appointments process to fill Senate vacancies.

These are important issues, and by taking action on them we will ensure our democratic system is ready to face the challenges of the future, ready to face those who would undermine our system's legitimacy to threaten the very underpinning of who we are. Taking action in these areas will build public confidence in our democratic institutions and ensure Canadian democracy and democratic institutions remain examples to the world.

Over 922,000 young people participated in the student vote program in their schools during the last federal election. In fact, I remember organizing the first student vote at M.M. Robinson in Burlington when I was in high school. I am sure there are many hon. members in this House who took part in their local campaigns. In the 2015 election, I participated in all the debates organized by Aldershot School as part of its student vote initiative.

Our democratic principles and values are being sparked today in the hearts and minds of young people all across Canada. Democracy is alive and well in this country, and I am optimistic and hopeful about our democracy's future. It is our job as leaders in our communities to do all that we can to ensure that young people, indeed all Canadians, whether we agree or disagree, embrace that proud Canadian democratic tradition.

[Translation]

Debates on any subject in the House of Commons are an essential component of our democracy.

I will vote against this motion, but I do respect the fact that we are having this debate today. We may not always agree, but when we do and we work together, we can make great progress.

•(1055)

[English]

This House can reflect and embody the very best of Canada and can accomplish great work, such as universal health care, the Charter of Rights, peacekeeping, old age security, and even expanding the franchise. Those who were in this House before we were put aside partisanship, listened to Canadians, and did the hard work the public demands of us.

Important work lies ahead of us to strengthen, to safeguard, to improve our democratic institutions. I look forward to doing it together.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will reflect back to the minister. She mentioned the expansion of franchise. In one of the few speeches she gave in the last year of Parliament, she gave a historical review of how franchise has been expanded in Canada, and she actually related those bold efforts by previous Parliaments to this effort around electoral reform. I will quote her:

I strongly believe that stepping away from the first past the post system and embracing a new system that can reflect these values...would be another milestone in the history of Canada's elections.

After talking about those historic milestones and moments in Canada of granting women the right to vote, and granting first nations people, Inuit, and Métis that right, she equated it to this historic milestone when she was not minister of democratic reform.

What is amazing to me, and I really must reflect this back to the minister, is she keeps using words like “respect” and “we listened to Canadians”. Canadians told the government that they wanted this changed. Canadians came to those town halls which she cited and quoted, and said that they wanted this changed. To listen means to listen and understand what people are saying. When the minister says that we all need to be examples, what example exactly is the Prime Minister setting for all those young Canadians when he says, “I can make a promise and I can break it because I'm the Prime Minister”?

I want to believe that the minister believes in the words that she just said. How is not simply admitting that the Liberals broke a promise and that that deserves an apology going to restore any faith in anyone young or old?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, it is important first to set the record straight. I am in fact the Minister of Democratic Institutions, and that has been the title of this portfolio for the past several years.

It is also important to recognize that we took the time to engage with Canadians, and I do stand by my words in this House before and today. What is incredibly important for us as a government is that we listen to Canadians and we listen to many different perspectives.

I know what the definition of “to listen” is, but I am not sure the member opposite does, because when we listen, we actually hear all of the perspectives. That is what we did over the past year. We went out and engaged and consulted. We heard from Canadians and we listened to many of them.

The member is correct in stating that there are some Canadians who want electoral reform and want a particular system. There are many Canadians who also cherish the system that we have, and right now, we have listened to them. This is why we are moving forward. Quite frankly, I am very excited in my mandate to move forward on this portfolio, because there is much work to be done to make sure that all Canadians have access to the vote and that we continue to do what we can to improve that access.

Business of Supply

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's predecessor in that portfolio said she believed that the first past the post system was outdated. I wonder what this minister's view of the first past the post system is.

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, there are pluses and minuses to any political system. The system that we have right now is one in which Canadians have confidence, in which Canadians believe, and in which Canadians trust. We as a democracy must continually look to improve, to strengthen, and to understand what our system is. Over the past year, that was an incredibly important conversation upon which we engaged with Canadians.

I think there is continuous work to be done. That is what being a democracy is: ideas, debating ideas, thinking about them, having that battle of where we sit and where we believe, and how we continue to engage people.

That is why I am here in this place, because I believe in the democracy that we have, and I believe in Canadians' trust in all of us on all sides of this House to represent Canadians' views. That is exactly what we are doing today, and I am grateful for the opportunity to stand here to have this conversation and continually reflect on what we can do to always be better.

• (1100)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was kind of dumbfounded by the minister's speech. I sincerely hope that she never expected to find herself in this position as Minister of Democratic Institutions when she decided to get into politics and offer her services to the Canadian people. Seriously, this is a real shame.

The Liberals campaigned on a promise of new environmental assessments. They did not deliver. They promised to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, but they are keeping the previous government's targets. They promised to defend our rights and freedoms by repealing Bill C-51. They did not deliver. They promised to restore home mail delivery. They have not delivered. They promised to change our voting system. They broke that promise.

Is that how they plan to regain the people's trust? Are they really trying to fight cynicism, or are they just doing politics the way it has always been done?

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague perhaps to clarify what he means about the situation I am in right now. With respect to what I have heard from opposition members on this, I am quite dismayed with the narrative they have been trying to build. I am incredibly proud to be serving Canadians. I am incredibly proud to be serving the constituents of Burlington who have the confidence and the trust in me to represent their voices in the House. I am incredibly proud to have the confidence of the Prime Minister to serve as a minister in his cabinet.

I hope all of us in the House feel the same way and that we are all here with integrity, with purpose, and with the commitment to democracy, which we should share.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to congratulate the minister on her recent appointment as Minister of Democratic Institutions. I also want to congratulate her on the quality of her French. That is important, and she expressed herself well in her speech. Well done.

I wonder if the minister agrees with her colleague from Fleetwood—Port Kells, in British Columbia, who was quoted in today's *Le Devoir* as saying:

We could have said that our promise that 2015 would be the last election held using the first-past-the-post system cannot be kept because we ran out of time and the timeframe was too short...Perhaps we could have held a referendum in 2019 to really gauge how Canadians feel about electoral reform.

Does the minister agree with her colleague, who, for his part, seems to support the main recommendation that the parliamentary committee has been making all year long?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his compliments on my French. I am always working to improve it, and I must say that I was in French immersion in Burlington. That is Canadian bilingualism.

Of course it is important for our government and for all members of the House to be able to express their opinions and represent their constituents.

We have said that a referendum would not be in the interests of Canadians at this time. I believe that what the Special Committee on Electoral Reform said is that if we were to change the system, a referendum should be held, but since that is not the path we will be taking, it would not be in the interests of Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I have not read the entire report, but I have read the summary of it, and the debate today has been very helpful and useful.

For the information of the minister, my colleague from Sydney—Victoria and I hosted an event. We did two events back to back. We did one meeting on the environment, took a break and then went into electoral reform meeting. A number of constituents had voiced interest in both. We had around 100 people for the environment and about 25 to 30 people stayed for the other meeting.

The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, whom I have a world of respect for as a parliamentarian, says that people want a change. This is not what we heard at our meeting. This came out in the debate. Two or three people really wanted a movement to proportional representation, but there were very strong opinions held by others. They believed in the first past the post system.

I want to ask the minister a question about mandatory voting. I have not read the entire report, but we know mandatory voting takes place in several countries. Where did it fit in with the overall scheme? Was that something that came out during the course of the discussions? In her responsibilities as minister, will it be something she will look at going forward?

Business of Supply

•(1105)

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for sharing his experience with the town hall process. As I mentioned in my speech, I really appreciate all the members who took the time to engage on this issue and, of course, every Canadian who came forward with many different points of view. That is what we do in a democracy; we listen to different points of view.

With regard to mandatory voting, that is an interesting question. As we know, over the past number of years, we have felt that we have not had the highest voter turnout when it has come to our general elections. Some have proposed that mandatory voting could be a way to deal with this issue. The special committee report recommends against mandatory voting. On the MyDemocracy.ca survey, Canadians came out heavily against mandatory voting.

I look forward to responding to the special committee's report in due course and will be confirming our position on that moving forward.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the previous speakers, in particular my two hon. colleagues from the New Democratic Party, who brought forward the motion today. They both have been at the forefront of this debate. Having served on committee with them has been a real pleasure. I should add that it was also a pleasure to serve with the Liberal, Bloc and Green members. As well, the awesome work we received from the Conservative members of the committee was very much appreciated.

Before I say anything else, I must stop and remember that I am splitting my time with the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, who has done yeoman service on the committee and has a lot of very intelligent things to say.

The motion before us today is:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government misled Canadians on its platform and Throne Speech commitment “that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system”, and that the House call on the government to apologize to Canadians for breaking its promise.

The statement that the promise had been broken and Canadians were misled is a statement of fact, so it is hard to disagree with that.

I share the view expressed by Rex Murphy that this was not a promise the Prime Minister was qualified to make.

I will read what Rex Murphy said in the spring of 2016. He stated:

[The Prime Minister's] dramatic declaration before the election that it would be the last under first past the post was not a pledge he was then or now entitled to make....changing how Canadians vote is not within the competence of a candidate or a prime minister.

Murphy goes on to say:

The power of the citizens' vote is the DNA of our democracy. It is not then in the Liberals' power...to alter the mechanism, play any parliamentary games to choose a [new] system without consulting the voters in a referendum with clear language on what they, the voters, prefer. No referendum, no change.

I agree 100% with Rex Murphy. That has been the position the Conservative Party has held from the beginning of this debate, indeed for a decade before this debate started to the present time, and it will continue to be our position into the future.

It is not unreasonable for a government to try to change the electoral system, as long as it gives voters the final say. Just as this was not the Prime Minister's promise to make, it was also not his promise to break.

What would have been responsible? What would be the normal course of a government acting on any other kind of promise? What should have been the course taken on that promise? It would have been for the government to sit down in a businesslike manner after the election, following the normal legislative process, and not after waiting for eight months, set up a committee to look at the legislation that it had proposed. It could be any model the government wanted, including its preferential model, although clearly that model would not have found public acceptance. Then, that model, once coming into legislation, would have been pitted against the status quo in a referendum. That is what should have happened. The government rejects all of these things, a referendum, or any alternative other than its preferred alternative, but that would have been the preferred option.

Recognizing this was the responsible course of action, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform tried to assist the Prime Minister to achieve this goal, the reasonable policy process I have outlined, in order to allow him to fulfill the meat of his election promise.

First, we proposed there be a referendum on a system that would stand a realistic chance of actually winning a referendum. There is no point having a referendum question that is guaranteed to lose. It would be on something that could potentially find the support of the Canadian people, a fair and reasonable system. The second point was, based on the testimony we heard, that it be a proportional system. The last point was that it could be implemented by election 2019.

I was obsessive in pursuing answers from the Chief Electoral Officer as to the amount of time he needed to change the system of Elections Canada to allow the government's promise to be met. The committee, then, in a brave and businesslike way, made sure its recommendations reflected the timelines so the Prime Minister's oft-repeated promise could be met, even as steps one and two as described had also been met. We achieved the recommendations, which I will come to in a second.

•(1110)

The Prime Minister's excuse for bailing out on his promise was that there was no consensus, which we have heard over and over again, but there were actually three separate levels of consensus reflected in the special committee's report. Let me now emphasize what those are.

First, four out of five parties on the committee supported the recommendation to hold a referendum on a proportional system versus the status quo.

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Second, we included the referendum component, in part, because the Conservatives insisted on it, but also because poll after poll over the course of the last year showed that a strong majority of Canadians wanted a referendum before they would accept a change to the system. They wanted the final say. Poll after poll, about a dozen over the course of the last year, indicated that, depending how the poll was done, between 65% and 75% of Canadians wanted a referendum, wanted to reserve for themselves that final say, and as low as 17% thought that passing a new system in the House of Commons was sufficient.

Let me provide some comments from some of the pollsters to give everyone an idea of just how strong this consensus among Canadians is.

Mario Canseco at Insights West told the special committee, “This majority of Canadians encompasses both genders, all age groups, every region and supporters of the three main political parties...”

Lorne Bozinoff from Forum Research said of his firm's data, “This is a very conclusive finding. There is a strong majority opinion in favour of a referendum...and it spreads across all regions and socioeconomic groups”.

Darrell Bricker of Ipsos Public Affairs told the special committee, “A majority in every demographic category we looked at supported a referendum—by gender, age, education level, income, and whether or not you had kids in your house”.

There we are, there is a second level of consensus.

Third, those who wanted a change came before the committee as witnesses, went to the open mikes, and advocated change. The overwhelming majority, and I am told it was around 80%, advocated for proportional representation as the alternative. Therefore, the committee, taking these things into account, made a recommendation, from which I am going to read. This is the recommendation, including a little preamble in the report. Recommendation 12 stated:

Observation: The Committee acknowledges that, of those who wanted change, the overwhelming majority of testimony was in favour of proportional representation. The Committee recognizes the utility of the Gallagher Index, a tool that has been developed to measure an electoral system's relative disproportionality between votes received and seats allotted in a legislature, as a means of assessing the proportionality of different electoral system options.

The Committee recommends that:

The Government hold a referendum, in which the current system is on the ballot;

That the referendum propose a proportional electoral system that achieves a Gallagher Index score of 5 or less; and

That the Government complete the design of the alternate electoral system that is proposed on the referendum ballot prior to the start of the referendum campaign period.

The last recommendation was designed to allow the government to have a free hand, as any government ought to have, to design the actual legislation, to put forward the system. There were, in fact, three proportional systems, which advocates of proportional representation indicated would suit them equally well. One is the multi-member proportional system, similar to what Germany and New Zealand have. The second is the single transferable vote system, similar to what Ireland and Malta have. The third is something that has been described as the rural urban model designed by Jean-Pierre Kingsley, our former chief electoral officer.

All of these models would have met with the ambitions of the advocates of proportional representation. They might not all have met with the ambitions of those who were concerned with issues relating to local representation, limits on party discipline, and other concerns that Canadians legitimately had. However, it would have been up to the government to try to design a system that would have accomplished the best of those objectives while, at the same time, meeting with the Gallagher index measure of proportionality.

All of this was done. There was a consensus every way we sliced it. A majority of parties in the House, a majority of Canadians, and a majority of advocates for change were all incorporated and the final recommendation allowed those who had reticence about change to potentially have their concerns met in the proposal the government could and should have brought forward for this May, allowing the Liberals to meet their promise, thereby bringing into the consensus even the government, up until the moment it changed its tune because the government believed there should be change regardless of whether it was popular.

• (1115)

Let me quote the Prime Minister. This is from an interview in April. He said:

A lot of people I've talked to have said, 'Oh yes, we really, really wanted electoral reform because we had to get rid of Stephen Harper, but now we have a government we sort of like so electoral reform just doesn't seem as much of a priority anymore....

Well, it's a priority to me. It's a priority to a lot of Canadians....

Later on he said that Canadians did not want it so much and neither did he, but let us notice how committed he was until he decided that it did not serve his own partisan interests.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with great respect and fondness, I thank my colleague for his comments.

For those Canadians who were not watching closely, the electoral reform committee got along incredibly well. We criss-crossed the country. I can look to a number of Conservative and Liberal colleagues, my friend from the Green Party, and friends from the Bloc who all participated. While Canadians might be somewhat suspicious thinking that if there were a bunch of politicians around a table that all that would happen is partisan back and forth, we got into this issue.

It is incredibly important, how we elect and un-elect governments; it is fundamental to everything that we do, our economic policy, our environment policy, every policy is based on this. It is also something that can unite us as parliamentarians in our listening and engaging with Canadians. The evidence was fascinating. This report on Canadian democracy, by the way, is the most thorough and comprehensive in Parliament's history.

I have a question for my friend. It has been almost 100 years since Parliament first started studying electoral reform, almost a century. Parliamentarians have been engaging with each other and with Canadians on this topic, because the system that we first had when the country was formed worked for two parties but it is not so great when there is more than two.

Here is the Liberal recommendation, and I would like my friend's comment on this:

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...regarding alternative electoral systems are [too] rushed, and are too radical to impose at this time....

Too rushed? Will it be another 100 years? How much more time do we need, how many more pages, and how many more Canadians do we need to talk to before it is not too rushed anymore? Is that actually not the barrier that stopped the Liberals from signing on to the consensus that was available to them?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, the obvious comment to make is that the sense of hurry was entirely imposed by the Liberals themselves.

It was never clear. I think it has become clear actually, but it was never stated clearly which system the Liberals preferred. There was this fiction that their minds were open, that they had not yet made up their minds, or the Prime Minister, as the former minister said, had a preferred system and so did she, but that that could be changed by the testimony they heard. The minister said that in a meeting in Victoria.

The bottom line the Liberals kept restating was that it must be ready to go by 2019. That was the sense of rush.

I have a theory, and I have shared this with my colleague in the past but let me share it with the House, that the Prime Minister had intended to run out the clock on electoral reform. First it would be too tight a timeline to have a referendum, then it would be too tight a timeline to have anything that involved redistribution or the addition of extra seats, one or the other of which is required if we go to any kind of proportional system, and finally all we have left is preferential ballot, a minor change after all, just changing the structure of the ballot itself, not the ridings or anything else. At least that was the story we would hear. However, because the promise of 2019 was sacred, the Liberals would move forward.

I think the testimony of Canadians so overwhelmingly demonstrated a lack of interest, indeed a strong opposition to a system that so clearly, methodically, election after election, favoured the Liberal Party, that it took the wind out of those sails and made it effectively impossible to move forward in that direction.

Finally, what the committee did was to demonstrate that it was possible to move forward by 2019 with a referendum on a proportional system. That point, I suspect, is when the Prime Minister said that they had to bail out of it.

• (1120)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate a number of the comments the member across the way has put on the record today. I do value, and very much so, the standing committee on electoral reform, its fantastic work, and the report that was ultimately brought forward.

However, I want to emphasize another point the Prime Minister has talked a great deal about. He wants to see members of this House not representing what Ottawa has to say to their constituents, but rather what their constituents have to say to Ottawa. I had town halls on his particular issue.

I would like to get the member's feedback on what he believes his constituents wanted with respect to electoral reform. For me, first

past the post was in fact quite popular. There was no consensus within Winnipeg North that I could detect on the different systems.

Which system does the member believe his constituents would like to see? Is the member in a position to tell us?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, having run over my last response, I will ask you how long I have for this one.

The Deputy Speaker: You have about 15 seconds, but I will give the hon. member a little latitude to at least finish his thought on the matter.

The hon. member.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is good not to apply very tight time constraints after the parliamentary secretary has asked a question, all things considered. I mean that with all respect and love.

The answer to his question is, we conducted a survey in my constituency in which we asked people if they thought it was appropriate for the government to change the system without a referendum, yes or no. The answer came back that over 80% in my constituency felt that a referendum was necessary. Eighty-one thousand responses were received across Canada from other Conservative MPs who asked the same question. The average was 90% felt a referendum was necessary. That very much reflects the national consensus that exists in other ridings as well, that a referendum is necessary in order to move forward. Once we do that, any system that is fair has the potential to actually win majority support from Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to speak today on this very important issue.

I will get into the details in a moment. Essentially, what is being asked for today is an acknowledgement that the Prime Minister has once again broken one of his campaign promises, concerning the voting system. There are many promises that the government has not kept. Let us remember that the Liberals got elected by promising to have a small deficit of \$10 billion. Today, we are hearing about a \$30-billion deficit. When will we get back to having a balanced budget? In 2055, even though the Liberal Party committed itself to doing it in 2019. He has not kept his promise about the deficit or about the debt.

As the Department of Finance states, Canada will have a \$1.5-trillion debt in 2050. The Liberals have not kept their promise when it comes to managing public funds; they were unable to keep their campaign promise concerning the income tax cuts promised to businesses; and they were unable to reduce Canadians' tax burden on a supposedly cost-neutral basis, since that has been done with an additional tax bill of \$3 billion. The Liberals had also promised to restore home mail delivery for all Canadians, but they were unable to keep that promise. What we have before us is a Prime Minister who is literally the champion of broken promises.

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I have been a member in the House of Commons for about a year. However, I have been a parliamentarian for eight years, since I sat in the Quebec National Assembly. In the last few days, I have witnessed an unprecedented event that I thought I would never see. Last week, the opposition leader asked the Prime Minister whether he would commit to not taxing private health insurance and private dental insurance. From his seat, on Wednesday of last week, the Prime Minister said he was not going to tax those two items. Bravo! Excellent. Congratulations. We were pleased to know this. It was a win for the Conservative Party, but, most importantly, it was a win for Canadians. On Tuesday, we held a vote. What did the Prime Minister and his Liberal members do? They voted against the Prime Minister's own words. That is unprecedented. More and more, the government is making its mark as the government of broken promises, and Canadians are increasingly aware of it.

Let us now come back to the question raised by my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie concerning the Liberal Party's promise to reform the voting system. First, let us be clear: this is indeed an important issue. However, the Liberal Party's campaign platform was 97 pages long. How many times did it mention changes to the voting system? There were three sentences on that subject. It cannot be said that this was a strong commitment.

During the 2015 election campaign, there were five leaders' debates on television, for a total of 10 hours of debate. Did the Liberal Party and the current Prime Minister ever raise this issue in those debates? No. The Green Party leader was the only one who raised the issue. We will see later why this is so important to her. It was not really the Liberal Party's bread and butter.

However, when it came time for the Speech from the Throne, the opening speech of a new Parliament, the Prime Minister, through the Governor General, said that 2015 was the last election under the existing electoral system. No one was laughing then. It became a solemn commitment by the government. Every effort would be made to implement this promise under the aegis of the Liberal Party, of course. We understand that. How has it all worked out?

I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, for the excellent work he has done. I have a lot of trouble with the names of ridings. Since the current Minister of Democratic Institutions will have a somewhat easier job to do than her predecessor, I urge her to recommend that the names of the federal ridings be reviewed. It makes no sense for them to be so long.

My eminent colleague, who has been a member of this House for years, has demonstrated remarkable leadership. Remarkable for our party, but, most importantly, remarkable for all Canadians. From day one, our party has said that, if perchance the government wanted to change the system, it would have to be done by referendum. We have not budged an inch on that point.

• (1125)

We said that because, fundamentally, we as politicians are in a perpetual conflict of interest when it comes to electoral reform. That is clear. We cannot be objective, since the future of our parties and our ridings is at stake. We are very close to it. That is why we want Canadians to have the final word on this.

We all know that the Prime Minister, the leader of the Liberal Party, wanted it to be a preferential ballot, because that worked for him. We all know, too, that our friends in the NDP and the Green Party member agreed that it should be a proportional system, because that worked for them. They are right to think like that. It is only natural and only human. That is why, ultimately, it has to be Canadians who decide.

Consultations then followed. I want to say that I was very proud to participate in that exercise with my colleague from Kingston and the Islands and other members. I want to recognize the hon. Jason Kenney, who took part in the consultations, along with all of my other colleagues who participated. I would particularly like to recognize the members in the government party, because the job was a very difficult one for them, and they handled it with honour and dignity.

We criss-crossed Canada. However, let us be honest: thousands of Canadians participated in the hearings, but there are 35 million Canadians. We cannot say that we were tripping all over each other all the time, except in Vancouver and Victoria, in the neighbourhood of the Green Party leader. I have to point out that she and her party were extremely effective. At every stop, Green Party members were waiting for us, even in my home, Quebec City. There was a Green Party supporter at a session in Quebec City. However, I have to say that we were not really tripping over each other since there were only 10 people present.

Therefore, when we hear that Canadians were consulted and all that, we have to recognize that there was not a great appetite for this debate. However, some members from all political parties organized kitchen meetings. We, the Conservatives, decided to appeal directly to Canadians with a fairly large document. I know that I cannot show it to members, but I will nevertheless try to describe it.

In this document, we dealt with the facts. On one full page, we had the arguments for and against holding a referendum. We consulted Canadians and this is what we found: of the 90,000 Canadians who responded to our surveys conducted all across Canada, 90% said that a referendum must be held. I would like to acknowledge the people of my riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, where 1,116 people responded to our survey and 1,004, or 90%, asked for a referendum.

We were very proud to see that Canadians supported our original position. However, we still needed to convince our colleagues. Well, we managed to do that. We were quite pleased, not to mention surprised, honestly, when our NDP colleagues and the leader of the Green Party said they agreed on having a referendum in order to allow Canadians to choose between the current system and a proportional system.

We know that the vast majority of people who wanted change wanted a proportional system. The idea was to allow Canadians to make the final decision because that is the right thing to do. The Bloc Québécois agreed from the outset, but we were quite pleased when the NDP and the Green Party joined our movement.

There was a consensus among the political class, but there was one piece missing: the Liberal Party. That is when the wheels came off. It was in an interview with *Le Devoir* on October 19, 2016, that the Prime Minister of Canada finally told it like it is:

...there were so many people unhappy with the [former] government and its approach that people were saying, "It takes electoral reform to avoid having a government we don't like."

Here is what the current Prime Minister said next:

However, under the current system, [Canadians] now have a government they are more satisfied with. And the motivation to want to change the electoral system is less compelling.

When it suits him, the system is left as is, but when it does not, it has to be changed. The Prime Minister's behaviour is very subjective. He changes his mind as often as he changes his shirt, whenever it suits him.

As a result, the Prime Minister is building a reputation as a breaker of election promises, as if that had not already been firmly established. However, it is not too late for the government.

• (1130)

If the Liberal government really wants to change the system, then it should hold a referendum. That is what we, the Conservatives, have been saying from the beginning, and all of the opposition parties agree that that is what should be done. The only way to change the electoral system is to let all Canadians have a say.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his speech and his participation in the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I had the privilege on several occasions to replace my colleagues from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and Skeena—Bulkley Valley. At one meeting, I was surprised to find myself listening to a witness who told us he represented several hundred thousand Canadians. A second witness said the same thing, and then a third. I suddenly realized that at a single meeting, I was looking at three witnesses who represented more than a million people. Because they believed the Prime Minister's promise, because they believed the commitment he made in the Speech from the Throne, they had taken very exhaustive measures to consult each of their members and to come before us to say that these millions of people wanted a system where every vote counts.

After breaking his promise, after renegeing on his commitment, the Prime Minister said he did not want to hold a referendum, because he was afraid of the consequences it had for Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent to tell us if there is any basis for those fears.

• (1135)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, whose question I welcome. A year ago, we worked together very closely in the debate on the issue of medical assistance in dying, which was a very sensitive subject. I have had the pleasure of seeing her several times during the debate on electoral reform as well.

The very foundation of democracy is allowing people to voice their opinions, contrary to what the Prime Minister has said in this very chamber about the referendum. It is really rather unusual to see a prime minister, in the very cradle of democracy and of freedom of speech and the democratic work that must be done as a country, saying that referendums are held to divide people. If he does not want things that divide people, then let us have no elections. Clearly, when there is an election, some people are going to choose one

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person while other people choose another. It would surprise me if there were 338 members from the same party and 100% of people voted for the same party in the next election.

The very foundation of democracy is to allow people to voice their opinions and, above all, to give them the chance to have the final say, when the time comes to choose a voting method, since the voting method is the fundamental system of any democracy.

The way we vote is how we choose the people who will represent us; we choose our prime minister, we choose our ministers, and everything else stems from that. It is too important to be left in the hands of politicians. It must be placed in the hands of Canadians.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to undervalue the fine work that the Standing Committee on Electoral Reform performed for the House, but I also want to emphasize the importance of representing constituents. I have had the privilege of speaking to that on many occasions inside this chamber, and I would like to believe that I am reflecting what I believe is the will and thoughts of my constituents. When I dealt with this issue, and I dealt with it in many different ways including a town hall, I found that there was no real consensus, and I have conveyed that to many. For example, a good number of people wanted to keep the current system. Others wanted to see some change. What was abundantly clear was that there was no consensus.

I thought the member's comments in regard to the standing committee were most interesting, especially in Quebec City. To what degree does the hon. member assign value to what took place in the committee versus the value we receive when we meet with and hear from constituents?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Kingston said it himself.

[*English*]

More than 81,000 answered our survey. This was the biggest participation of Canadians in this process, better than any other experiment that we had, and especially for the committee.

In my home riding, we talked about what my constituents wanted to talk about. In my own riding more than 1,000 people answered my survey, and on behalf of them, 90% of the people of my riding asked for a referendum. We had a consensus on that in all parties except one: the Liberal Party.

If there is a problem, it is on the Liberal side, not on our side.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

Today I am here to speak to the NDP's very important motion that is asking the Prime Minister of Canada to apologize for a very important broken promise on electoral reform.

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When I was campaigning I knocked on a lot of doors, and I was saddened by the level of cynicism. People were telling me at the door, “I do not think I am going to vote. It does not feel as if my vote means anything. I do not like the system; it does not work. I do not feel I am connected”. Often that conversation would lead into a very important conversation about electoral reform, and what kind of systems are happening in other parts of the world and how they engage the members of their communities in a new and more meaningful way.

I am so grateful, and I want to thank the many members of my riding who have talked to me about this important, foundational issue. Whether it was one of the four town halls, because in a riding as large as mine there is no such thing as doing one town hall, or the survey that was sent to every household in the riding, or through personal conversations, I heard loudly and clearly that this was a conversation my constituents wanted to be a part of. That is important, because the government members seem to keep thinking this is about consensus.

I came and I did town halls, and a lot of people did not know much about different systems and there were a lot of questions. At the end of the day, people were not always sure of what system they wanted, but they did know they wanted to have this conversation, they wanted their voices to be heard, and they wanted to learn more. Therefore thousands of my constituents participated. In fact, so far this is the issue that people engaged in the most profoundly. The people at my offices were amazed by the survey responses we got and kept receiving for months. The issue matters to the people of North Island—Powell River and that means it matters to me, as does following through with commitments.

Since the announcement was made by the minister that meaningful electoral reform was no longer part of moving forward, my staff have been overwhelmed with emails and phone calls. Ironically, the announcement from the minister was made, and less than a week later my constituents opened their mailboxes to see my mail-out that told them that the report that we had created on their feedback on electoral reform was on our website. In a matter of hours, we received well over 100 emails because people who received it in their mailbox and they were very upset that they did not get what they wanted from the government.

What we are talking about today is important. It is about listening to the people of this country. It is about engaging them in a meaningful conversation about what our democracy means. The current government asked us to do its work and hold town halls and surveys, and we did. We all got into our communities and we did surveys and town halls, and we opened up this discussion because we believed and we had faith that this would be a real discussion about change.

Today I am going to share some of the results from the thousands of constituents of North Island—Powell River. I posed several statements for constituents. The scale was as follows: 1 was strongly disagree, and it ranged up to 5, which was strongly agree.

The first statement was, “Parties' seats in Parliament should reflect the percentage of votes they receive”. The response was overwhelming: 75 % strongly agreed and 9% agreed. That means

over 84% wanted to see a system where every vote meant something, where every vote counted.

The second statement was, “Working collaboratively and having cross-party support is vital”. Eighty-seven per cent agreed.

The third statement was, “Having a local representative is important to me”. This statement received the highest support, with over 88% agreeing or strongly agreeing.

The claim that there is no consensus around electoral reform is false. The numbers I compiled in my riding are proof. The current e-petition urging the Liberal government to follow through on its campaign commitment surpassed 92,000 signatures, making it the most signed petition on the Parliament of Canada's website. That is proof.

I was never under the illusion that this would be easy or that the process would be wrapped up quickly, but I am a strong believer in process. We may not have collectively picked the next electoral system, but one lady said to me in her written statement that she was a bit old, and understanding all the different systems I taught them about took a lot of work; she does not have a full answer yet, but she wants to continue this discussion. She said it is such an important one.

• (1140)

I believe we have the broad consensus necessary at least to continue this process. Canadians want a more proportional system and that we know. During the work of the committee nearly 90% of the experts and 80% of the members of the public who testified called on the government to adopt a proportional electoral system.

By abruptly terminating this process and blaming the voters for it is revolting. The management of this file from the start shows us a consistent behaviour that forecasted a Liberal Party determined to keep the current system because it benefits its members. This behaviour could be seen by the length of time it took for the government to start the committee, by the outrageous comments made by the former minister aimed at undermining the committee's work where her own people were hurt, or the online survey MyDemocracy.ca, which was immediately ridiculed from all sides. Canadians criticized the biased and vague questions and felt very manipulated.

Whether this is a lack of courage for moving forward or a broken promise from the very start, Canadians are feeling betrayed and are extremely disappointed. New Democrats are determined to have the Liberals apologize to Canadians.

During the town halls I heard things like, “I just want my vote to count. I want to feel I can vote the way my conscience tells me and strategic voting is something we no longer have to consider.”

The Prime Minister's misleading promise of electoral reform breeds cynicism in our politics and that is heartbreaking. It is heartbreaking when we see people of all ages not participating in our democracy the way that we want to see them participate. This conversation would have opened some of those doors and provided a deep and meaningful opportunity for people to feel that they are a part of creating this system for Canadians.

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How can the Prime Minister and Liberal MPs justify engaging Canadians fundamentally, pretending that they are listening, only to let them know that their voice no longer matters? The motion we are debating is about honesty and commitment to what we believe in.

The Liberals have said they will always consult with Canadians on many fronts and on many topics. Canadians have a right to ask whether these are just delaying tactics or more broken promises. What is needed is a little more action and a little less conversation, as one great singer once said.

The consultations helped me to further grasp people's concerns about representation and decision-making in this place. I sincerely enjoyed the town halls. The discussions became quite passionate. Constituents were taking a real interest in what different systems mean and what they want to see in their democracy.

A man said to me, "I am tired of watching everyone yell at each other in Parliament. We need a system that makes parliamentarians work together. The best decisions have mostly come from minority governments, where parliamentarians had to work together. I want a system that says you have to work together and not just call another election when the going gets tough."

I must plead with the government. My constituents are asking me to work with the government on electoral reform. With 39% of the votes, how can Liberals unilaterally close this process when they know proportionality is at the heart of this discussion?

I believe this motion is fair. The people in my riding were interested in a real discussion. There was a lot of curiosity and a lot of openness. They worked hard to give their opinions to me and to the government. They participated in this important discussion in good faith. The people of Canada were not asked if this discussion was over. They were told. It would be only fair to the many people who participated, who came to events across Canada, who filled out multiple surveys, who started to seriously consider what other systems look like, who really contemplated what a new system of democracy would mean in Canada, that the Liberal government apologize.

• (1145)

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, undertook to do consultations and I found that there was a core of people who were deeply interested in learning about electoral reform, but there were about as many people who felt that we were misplacing our energy. They asked why we were not focusing on the economy, on job creation, on the environment, or on health care. I received different feedback in that sense. The majority of people unfortunately that I tried to engage said that they were not that knowledgeable about the issue nor that interested. However, I did feel that the process was valuable, because I myself learned a lot about different procedures and different ways of voting, and the people who did engage also found that. However, I did find that there was no consensus. A lot of people said they were learning about the issue.

The member said that there was a clear consensus from her consultations, but that differs from what I found. I would like to understand a bit more about that.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Jamie Deith and Guy Polkington who came to the town halls and educated people. They were both very well versed in different systems.

It was amazing to see people from the riding come forward. It is absolutely the case that there are some people who know a lot and some people who know very little, but what I heard again and again, regardless of what they came to the town halls to talk about is they wanted to be part of the conversation. They wanted to have a meaningful discussion, and they were really interested. We talked about different systems. We talked about what the committee was talking about. People were really engaged.

I think it is very unfair to say that there was no consensus. There may not have been a consensus on a particular type of system, but there was a lot of curiosity and a lot of discussion, and people wanted to move forward.

Yes, they wanted to move forward on those important things, like making sure they have a good-paying job, making sure there is the home care that is needed for the many seniors that I serve. I was very unhappy to have to share with them the broken promises from the government on those issues as well.

• (1150)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one wonders why such a strident promise was made by the government. This is what I have been thinking about during this debate. I would tend to agree with the previous speaker that, indeed, there may not have been the appetite for change, which is what the interaction in my own riding found.

However, the real point here is that a promise was made. A promise was made and repeated I do not know how many times in the House. It is not the only promise the government made. The Liberal Party made many promises during the campaign, including that of running an absolute maximum \$10-billion deficit and balancing the budget before 2019. That promise has been completely blown out the window.

I would be delighted to have the member comment on the credibility of a government that just seems able to promise anything and its seeming indifference to the promises made during the campaign.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's very important question goes to the very core of what this motion is about today. The motion is about the fact that the government made a promise repeatedly and the government's actions did not follow through with the promise at all from day one.

There was the waiting for the committee to be set up. There was a vague and changing commentary. The Prime Minister stood up repeatedly, as he was campaigning outside and inside the House, and made a very profound promise to all Canadians. It was a fundamental, foundational promise, because it is about the very way we engage with people in how we vote. It is something that needed to be done in a more appropriate way.

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The committee worked so hard. It worked hard all summer long. It provided a huge report for parliamentarians and Canadians. To see that report come out and then some weird survey that does not deal with the core issues of what we were asking Canadians was devastating.

I recently finished 11 town halls in my riding on seniors issues. The people in my riding are suffering profoundly, especially the seniors. What I heard again and again was that people were devastated by the fact that even though there was a promise made during the election to put \$3 billion into home care to make sure that people could get the support that they needed, it was not there.

I am very concerned about the cynicism in this country, because promises are not being kept.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enthusiastically stand in support of the motion before the House today. While I must admit I am not surprised that it has come to this, I am very disappointed, because despite all we know about Liberals consistently breaking promises throughout the history of Liberal governments, hope is hard to extinguish.

Despite the disappointment of the last election results for New Democrats, I could not help but be buoyed by the faith, the hope, and the optimism Canadians demonstrated in voting for change. However, as we enter into the third calendar year of this so-called real change government, it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine what change there has been, other than switching from blue to red. It is a cosmetic switch at best.

After meeting targets for refugee applicants, largely on the goodwill of private citizens, the government has stemmed the flow at a time when the need to welcome displaced citizens is most urgent. It has backtracked on its promise to protect the environment. The Liberals have yet to restore protections to our navigable waters in response to legislation by the Conservatives before them who gutted that important environmental law. The government has refused to recognize the devastating effects of colonialism and continues to underfund first nations education. The Liberal government pays ineffectual lip service to implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It continues to challenge veterans in court. It has also executed a blatant about-face on its promise of electoral reform.

The Prime Minister's promise to Canadians was clear and unequivocal. Sixteen months ago on the election trail, he stated that his party would "make every vote count", and more than 1,800 times claimed that a Liberal government would be committed to ensuring that the 2015 election would be the last federal election using first past the post. As recently as last October, the Prime Minister restated his support for electoral reform, describing it as "a commitment that we made in our election that I continue to be deeply committed to". I am starting to wonder if members of the governing party actually understand what the word "commitment" means. In fact, I think it is reasonable that anyone in a committed personal or professional relationship with a government party member might have reasonable cause to worry.

It has truly been disheartening for Canadians to watch the Prime Minister and his ministers turn away from their commitment to a fair election process, to the point where the Minister of Democratic

Institutions' brand new mandate letter does not even include electoral reform.

Breaking this promise not only reflects badly on the Prime Minister and his party, but it also damages our democratic system and tarnishes the credibility of all MPs in the House. It reinforces the cynical belief that politicians are only interested in getting elected and will say anything to gain power. It eats away at the fabric of our democracy as people lose trust in the political system.

Making promises they never intended to keep further disenfranchises those voters who flocked to the polls in droves to vote for change. People believed the Liberal Party actually wanted to create change. People were sold a bill of goods and now are left with the status quo and a loss of trust in our political system. The effects of this betrayal are as devastating as the voter suppression tactics Liberal members decried in the 2011 election campaign. It is not an exaggeration to say that democracy itself is at risk. This is a betrayal of every Canadian who voted to change the electoral system, as well as every representative who vowed to do politics differently. The unvarnished truth is that the Liberals are ignoring what is best for Canadians and keeping the current system because they think it benefits them. It seems clear to me that commitments and promises are meaningless to the Prime Minister.

It leads me to wonder what will be the next promise to be broken. Will it be the promise of secure and accessible pensions for our veterans? Just like democratic reform, that was a key election promise. Just like democratic reform, it made it into the minister's mandate letter, yet here we are in 2017 with the pension promises unkept and veterans back in court fighting the government, a government that pledged to honour its sacred obligation to the men and women who serve this great country.

• (1155)

The Liberal Party's claim that there is no consensus among Canadians for electoral reform is deeply cynical and intentionally misleading. It is a refusal to acknowledge reality. It is astounding, it is arrogant, and it is breathtaking to behold.

Here are the facts. Two-thirds of Canadians voted in the last election for parties promising electoral reform. During the committee hearings, almost 90% of expert and 80% of public testimony called for the government to adopt a proportional voting system. When that testimony did not suit the government's purposes, it resorted to an online survey that was extremely biased, poorly designed, and did not even ask Canadians which electoral system they preferred.

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I have been watching with interest the response on the online parliamentary petition, e-616, initiated by Jonathan Cassels of Kitchener, Ontario, and sponsored by my hon. colleague the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. The petition calls on the Government of Canada to keep its commitment to Canadians on electoral reform. Canadians are responding by the hundreds every hour. The counter on qualifying signatures now sits at over 92,000, and the petition is open for signatures until March 2. It will be very interesting to see how many Canadians respond. I would caution the government to pay close attention to this response from Canadians. They mean it.

Clearly, rather than lacking consensus, Canadians are passionately invested in electoral reform, and they overwhelmingly support a system of proportional representation over the current first past the post one.

I am beginning to wonder if we need to publish a parliamentary dictionary to ensure that the words “commitment” and “consensus” are used properly by the Prime Minister and his government front bench.

While we are at it, that dictionary should include the definitions of the words “diversity”, “inclusion”, “democracy”, and “equality”, because while the Minister of Democratic Institutions has commented that the current electoral system has served Canadians reasonably well for the last 150 years, the veracity of that statement is highly questionable.

Who exactly is it who has been served reasonably well by this archaic system? Have women, persons of colour, or indigenous Canadians been served well? Sadly, none of those groups have been well served by the current system.

How can the Prime Minister not see that his message, “To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength”, is in complete opposition to his stubborn refusal to reform our democratic system to be more diverse, more inclusive, and more representative of the people who make this country great.

Action speaks louder than words, and empty rhetoric is unacceptable. The Liberals had to be shamed into forming an electoral reform committee that did not give them the majority advantage. That battle lost, they chose to ignore and dismiss the committee's report, which was the result of hundreds of hours of work and broad consultation on the part of MPs of all parties. Their staff and the parliamentary clerk's office all participated. The committee set a clear path for the Prime Minister to keep his promise to Canadians. He need only instruct his minister to follow it.

It is really a very simple question. Has the Prime Minister misled Canadians, or does he intend to keep his promise on electoral reform? Canadian voters would like to hear the answer. Members of the House would like to hear that answer. What is it? Has the Prime Minister misled Canadians, or will he do the honourable thing and keep his promise on electoral reform?

We are about to see the real measure of the Prime Minister, and Canadians will be the judges.

● (1200)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has formed six provincial governments in this country and has had the opportunity to reform electoral systems in jurisdictions where it had full and complete control as a result of the first past the post system. In Ontario, in particular, and I think the member was very familiar with this, when first past the post was offered an alternative and there was a referendum in Ontario.

I am wondering if the House could have the explanation as to why the NDP campaigned against a provincial referendum that would have provided mixed member proportional representation and why the switch in position is now being propagated as being consistent with NDP policy on a historical basis, when in fact it never actually supported proportional representation in Ontario when it had the chance to cast ballots or lead a conversation on that in the province?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, that is very interesting. Back in 1996, as a New Democrat, I was on a committee that travelled the province to ask Ontarians about what kind of system they would like to see. We explored various possibilities, and proportional representation was a very significant part of that. That is why it has become NDP policy. Speaking of referendums, they can be very difficult and misleading.

The Liberal Government of Ontario made very sure that, before the referendum in Ontario about voting ever happened, it did nothing. It made sure that the public did not understand the question. It made sure that the public had no information. It made sure that there was no possibility that first past the post would be abandoned.

I would say it is time, after nearly 100 years, to get over this silly wrangling and do something that means voters in this country will be secure, be respected, and have Parliaments that reflect our population.

● (1205)

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is grave concern over what has happened in my riding. When we did the government's work by having a town hall meeting, we came up with a consensus to have a new voting system going into 2019.

We also know that the Prime Minister said many times, and this is factual, that this was the last election with the first past the post system, and the new system would be put in for 2019.

However, the Prime Minister has now said, just a couple of days ago, that the Liberals are going to abandon this commitment. To us, that is a betrayal of what they ran on.

What I do not understand is the excuse the Liberals are using, that they could not reach a consensus. I am asking the hon. member for her comments. We have many other issues on which we cannot reach consensus, but the government pushes them through.

Why is it this issue that they cannot reach consensus on, and why are they betraying Canadians?

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Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I think it is pretty simple: the Liberals did not get the answers they wanted.

I had a town hall meeting in London, Ontario, with my colleagues. It was on a hot summer Sunday. More than 300 people came out because this was important. There was consensus in that room. They wanted their issues to be addressed. They were very clear. Of course there are always one or two dissenters. That is understandable. However, these folks were passionate. We made absolutely sure that it was a non-partisan event. We were scrupulous about that.

I would say that it comes down to a third party in the 2015 election with nothing to lose and a new young leader willing to say anything in order to grab the headlines, in order to grab attention, in order to plug into that youth vote. That is exactly what happened. He was willing to say anything, with no intention to follow through.

That is not what governments do. Governments behave with ethics and with dignity. We have not seen that yet.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the very soft-spoken, humble, and frequently heard member for Winnipeg North as I address this issue.

First, this is an important issue, and I want to begin my comments by acknowledging the residents of the riding I represent, the individuals in particular who turned out to the town hall meeting I held on this at Toronto City Hall. I also want to acknowledge the organizations Leadnow, 350.org, the Canadian Labour Congress, and other social agencies that took the time to visit with me in the office and present ideas and briefs on this issue. I also want to acknowledge the letters that came in during the campaign, the conversations at the door, and the letters that have flowed from the decision we made last week. It is clear that people are engaged to a degree on this issue in different ways, with different principles and different ideas, and their input and advice is one of the best parts of this job that I hold on their behalf. Talking with them and dialoguing is critically important, and I want to thank them for their effort to move this agenda forward and to create a consensus on a particular system, a consensus that unfortunately has failed to materialize.

I also want to thank the parliamentarians for their work on this file: the critics I talked with, the committee that has worked on this, and the ministers. It was not just a commitment made in an election campaign. It was a commitment made in this House. An honest effort has been put into this issue over the last 18 months, as promised in the campaign platform, to try to find a consensus on a particular system on which to move forward with reform.

As has been acknowledged by the Prime Minister, by the minister, and by myself to my constituents, this is a commitment on which we do not see a way forward clearly and quickly, and we have had to make a decision.

There are a couple of reasons for this, and one I think is important. As a former journalist, I have covered politicians who have changed course on issues, and members can look it up and watch the videotape. If we as a country, let alone a democracy or a Parliament, are unable, with new evidence, new circumstance, and new challenges, to change direction, if all we rely on is ideology and a

preconceived set of platforms to rule every issue and govern every decision, if we are unable to have that flexibility, I think we are not democratic. I believe we have to listen and we have to work with the opposition, with our citizens, with civil society in all of its forms and institutions, and when we make a commitment, we have to give it honest effort. However, if it is impossible to move forward or if there are other priorities that displace it, we have to be open and honest with the citizens of this country and with our colleagues in this House, and explain the decision we have made.

I think one of the things that is the hallmark of this government is not trying to spin this and not trying to skate away from it or just rag the puck and pretend we just could not get it done. We have made a decision, and it is appropriate and right that we be held accountable for that, but it is also right and proper for our reasons to be stated correctly.

The characterization by the other parties, in particular the party that has brought forward this motion, is that we never intended to keep this promise. That is just flatly wrong. If we check the record in the last Parliament, I voted for mixed member proportional. The NDP at that time launched a massive social media campaign in my riding saying I had not done that.

Craig Scott, the member who was defeated in part because of this sort of behaviour, led a campaign to say that I had not voted for his motion. The record shows completely the opposite. When we characterize someone's record deliberately and inaccurately for political gain, that is the cynicism about which we all need to be careful.

Let me tell the House why we had to shift gears on the issues. We have made another commitment not to bring omnibus bills forward. I was talking to a member of the Conservative Party the other day, a former minister, saying that I understand now why they might have been so tempted to fall into the trap of a perpetual stream of omnibus bills. That is in large part because getting single pieces of legislation through this House can be extraordinarily time consuming, based on the number of days we sit, the committee work that must follow, and the consultation that is derided as delay but I think fundamental to good government, the consultation that is required on tricky pieces of legislation such as marijuana, public safety, housing, and changes to the EI.

Business of Supply

●(1210)

These are all programs that we are working on and consulting on, despite defined election promises to make sure that we get it absolutely right and that we incorporate ideas other than our own, which I think is the essence of good government. Quite often, we are told to move quickly and deal with this or slow down and consult. It is a contradictory set of criticisms that stand issue by issue. Sometimes we get co-operation and we can move something like the fentanyl response through the House quickly; other times, and I guess it is the opposition's job to slow us down, the opposition slows us down.

Looking at some of the issues in front of us, such as truth and reconciliation, and the good advice from the party opposite about needing to move faster, harder, and quicker and have more success in those files, that requires a legislative response, and we need to clear a path for that. As for the national housing strategy, that is the main reason I ran. Of all of the commitments that I made, I was unequivocal with my electorate that that was the highest and most significant priority for me, and that is why I sought office in Ottawa: to establish, fund, and deliver a national housing program. If I am asked whether there are different priorities and if I rank them, I do, and that is one of them. Getting that program through the House requires a legislative path.

The same can be said about immigrant resettlement. I just hear the party opposite say that we have stemmed the flow of immigrants into this country. For the last two years, this government has set the two highest levels of entry for refugees in the history of this government over 150 years, and yet we are being told that we stemmed the flow. This alternative approach to factual information is what sows cynicism. One could argue that we could do more, and I would invite the pressure to do more than 25,000 this year, as opposed to the 9,000 cap we inherited from the previous government.

I would see that as good advocacy on behalf of a vulnerable group, but we also know that when we bring in 25,000 refugees, because we are bringing them into a country that has not had immigrant resettlement services funded properly over the last decade, we have to have English as a second language, day care, language training for both men and women, which is not always distributed equally, housing, jobs and training, and a connection to and the recognition of foreign credentials. All of these things need to be in place in order to increase the 25,000 to 26,000, 27,000, or 28,000. We have to systematically build up that system. All of those programs require a legislative pass forward.

With the time in front of us, combined with the volatility of international affairs, which are changing some of the pressures on this government on a day-to-day, tweet-by-tweet basis, we need the flexibility to not only deliver on our mandate and the commitments that we have told Canadians are our priorities, we also need the flexibility to act on areas where none of us contemplated issues that needed to be changed. Therefore, we made a decision, and I am proud of that decision. I am proud of the decision to prioritize the needs of Canadians in a particular way.

Let me speak, finally, to this issue of consensus. There may have been consensus over certain general ideas, ideas that the system needed changing, ideas that mixed member proportional or some sort

of proportional system was better than another system, but it came down to a precise system, with a precise number of MPs elected in a particular way, with particular majorities, particular regions, and particular methodologies. I respect the call from the parliamentary committee to have a referendum, which was later backtracked on by one of the parties included in that so-called consensus. When that issue materialized, that created even more complications to this file and even less consensus.

I held a town hall in my riding. There were New Democrats there. The New Democrats were explicit in saying not to hold a referendum. Who betrayed that voice at that party? I did not. The issue is this. There was a concise, precise, and honest commitment to try to change this system. We failed to find the common ground we thought might emerge in this Parliament and we have had to reassess the priorities we are challenged with in this country.

If I am being asked if continuing the work on this when no common ground is found, in fact, mostly just battleground is found, is more important than delivering a national housing strategy, I, as an elected representative from Spadina—Fort York, will sustain the most important commitment I made to myself, to my constituents, and to this country, which is to fight for a national housing strategy above all other priorities in the House. My colleagues know that is my priority and I hope the opposition understands that is my priority.

If I had to make a choice, we have to set priorities in a different order based on circumstance, evidence, and pathways forward as a Parliament. Quite clearly, the Liberal Party has had to make that choice. We will make that decision public, as we did, we will be held accountable, as we are being held right now, and we will move forward in a way that I think is responsible, honest, and clear.

●(1215)

That is the break from the past behaviour of other governments. It is the accountability that we take on this issue, the fact that we are willing to stand here and face this Parliament and talk about what our priorities are, and work so hard to get them delivered.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of comments. My friend said there was no common ground, only battleground. That is a despairing way to look at the ability of members of Parliament to work. In fact, there was common ground, and there are two things that are important to point out. He said that other things are the priority of the Liberals, as if that would then displace the promises that were made because they would rank something else higher. One can walk and chew gum at the same time. The Liberals can keep their promise while having priorities like housing and first nations. Of course New Democrats and progressive Canadians want the government to succeed on this. They want it to keep its promise as well. He made it sound as though the two things were somehow dislocated.

Business of Supply

My question to the member is this. He said that when we came to a precise example there was nothing on offer. Do members know who was completely silent at every moment? It was not just the Liberals who sat on the committee but the minister's office and the Prime Minister's Office. Whenever we put forward different models asking, "What about this one? What about that one? How do we confirm this? Is it through a referendum or a vote in the House?", the Liberals were silent.

If the committee had arrived at the electoral system that the Prime Minister liked, does the member think he would be so despairing about the lack of consensus? Does he think, if the Prime Minister got his way and the system that he preferred was the result from the experts and witnesses that we heard, which it was not, that we would be having this debate right now? To say he has other priorities is fine, but he is trying to somehow twist that logic by saying that other priorities forced the Liberals to break their promise or that they broke their promise because of Donald Trump or uncertainty in the world. The Liberals have said that because there is a youth suicide epidemic they cannot do electoral reform. I say that is shameful. For my friends across the way to be proud of this decision is confounding. It is unbelievable to me that they would suggest that breaking a solemn promise to Canadians and their constituents makes them proud. I am baffled by this.

I heard from a Liberal member last night that the Liberals talked about this in caucus once, which was the day they broke that promise. Maybe he was not telling me the truth either, but I can only go on what I hear. The Liberals told me that the minister found out the morning she was to go out and break the promise. That was what her parliamentary secretary had told his constituents. Maybe that is a lie as well. My friend can confirm it.

• (1220)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, it is one thing for the New Democrats to get in the head space of an opposition party, pretend to understand facts that are not true and then pretend that they are, and it is another thing to get inside a caucus room and then report it back the way the member just did. However, I will leave those comments there.

Let me say three things.

The first is that the Prime Minister is a proud and dedicated parliamentarian. If Parliament speaks with a single voice, he listens. That is true.

The second is that the member opposite uses this analogy of walking and chewing gum at the same time. I would remind him that no matter how big one's mouth is there is only so much gum one can put in it at any given time, and sometimes it is not a question of whether one is walking, it is a question of whether one has to run to get to a response and solutions because the urgency is there.

The third is with respect to this notion that we were silent on this issue. The member knows, as the Speaker would know as he has seen me cross the floor to talk with this member, that we were not silent, that we had conversations with that member, and other members. He knows that members on this side of the House reached out to members on the other side of the House and talked. One of the reasons we were silent while we listened was because we were

engaged in trying to find the common ground and not simply establish a battleground.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member said that the government has many priorities and that there is no room for this one because there is so much on its plate now, including the election of Mr. Trump to the presidency.

I would ask the member this question. Is the idea of a cabinet government not that the different ministers take responsibility for different things? I am wondering which new priority has intruded so much on the Minister of Democratic Institutions that she does not have any time for electoral reform.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, the minister has identified what is in her mandate letter, and what her work plan is. She has prioritized things like reversing the unfair elections act that your party put in place, and changing the way vulnerable populations have access to the ballot box so they can participate in the electoral process.

I would say that democratic reform is not simply the way one votes, it is also the way in which committees are structured, and how they engage the public and tour the country.

When we look at the all-of-government approach, yes, ministers have individual files and responsibilities to the Prime Minister and to this House. However, when we look at them in sequence and collection, we had to reshuffle priorities, and we did. We have been open and accountable about what we see as the priorities. They are housing, indigenous affairs, and the health care accord, which has the home care money embedded into it if the provinces would sign on. All of that is a set of priorities, and it is the opposition's job to evaluate whether those are the right or wrong ones. However, I can say that this government is clear on where it is going.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Just to clarify, I am sure the hon. member did not mean my party; he meant the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston's party.

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the past, it is always a privilege to be able to rise in this beautiful chamber and express some thoughts. I have a number of opinions I would like to share with members on this specific issue.

There have been a great number of consultations, and no one should question the number of consultations that have taken place. The minister made reference to the fact that it is quite likely one of the most exhaustive consultation processes that we have witnessed in many years, and it has taken all forms. I know the former minister and the parliamentary secretary visited every region, province, and territory in the country where there were town halls, round tables, and all forms of discussions that took place, all in an attempt to get some feedback on an important issue.

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We know that the Special Committee on Electoral Reform did an outstanding job at reaching into the different regions of the country. They met publicly over 50 times and heard numerous presentations. I have had the opportunity to take a look, although I have not read the entire report but I am very much aware of the feedback that has been provided on that report. As I said earlier when I was asking a question, I do not underestimate the value of the minister and parliamentary secretary and the work they did or that of the special committee.

I want to go back to an issue that has always been important to me, to reflect what I believe the constituents I represent truly believe on different issues. It is important for me to raise it here because I concur with what was stated in the Prime Minister's mandate letter and given to our new Minister of Democratic Institutions. Let me just read it into the record. The mandate letter states, "A clear preference for a new electoral system, let alone a consensus, has not emerged. Furthermore, without a clear preference or a clear question, a referendum would not be in Canada's interest."

I am just going to base this in my discussions within Winnipeg North. I circulated thousands of cards. I put out thousands of phone calls. I am not overestimating or underestimating; it was into the thousands. I had two town halls. They were not overly well attended, but that is as much as I could do in terms of communicating and trying to encourage people to come in. Most important, I met with constituents in different types of forums, and I can honestly say, as the Prime Minister indicated in that mandate letter, there was no consensus coming from my constituents.

Yes, there was a group of constituents who really felt the need to see change. I am hoping that we will be able to achieve some of the changes, maybe in a different way that would at least allow them to feel good about what our current Minister of Democratic Institutions is taking on. There are some wonderful initiatives, and I would challenge members across the way to maybe share some of their ideas, whether on Bill C-33 or on other aspects that the minister has talked about, because there are many other aspects to reforming the system that we can take where we could build that consensus. However, let there be no doubt that there was no consensus.

How do we take all the different ideas and thoughts and formulate them into a referendum question? I do not think there would have been the value that members across the way believe there would have been. Had there been a clear consensus or something that we collectively in this House believed would be a positive option for Canadians to look at and pass through a referendum, then possibly we might have. I do not know. I am not a big fan of referendums myself, unless the need could be well demonstrated. Having said that, if there had been, we might have been able to move forward on this, and I suspect we would have. It is clear that there really was no consensus.

• (1225)

Over 350,000 Canadians participated in MyDemocracy.ca. There were all sorts of discussions. The member across the way asked to what degree we talked with other members. I recall sitting inside this chamber having a discussion with the leader of the Green Party about this. I have had the opportunity to meet with many members to talk about this issue.

At the end of the day, the consultations were in fact extensive. We take some pride in knowing that we did our homework in ensuring that, as much as possible, we reached into our communities, the nation at large, to see if we could come up with something. An honest effort was put forward. At this point in time, it is also important to recognize that there was no consensus. Seeing that, we need to move on and see if there are other issues about which we could talk.

The minister made reference to something that is a real threat to our democracy, and that is cyber-threat through the Internet. The minister talked about what we should do to protect our political parties that have these websites, or the Elections Canada websites. Cyber-threats are very real today, and it occurs. We have seen or heard of cyber-threats in other elections in other jurisdictions. We should be talking about that.

The minister made reference to the way in which we raise funds. The opposition has been talking about changes. We have had rules now in place for many years, and it is time we look at ways to ensure there is more openness and transparency. The Prime Minister has said that we can always improve and make things better. Let us take advantage of what the Prime Minister and the Minister of Democratic Institutions have talked about and look at ways we can make it more transparent and open. If one is the leader of the Conservative Party, or the leader of the New Democrats, or a federal minister, or even the Prime Minister, if there are fundraising events, then those events should be made public.

There are many ideas that members across the way could contribute to this debate. I have a number of ideas, many of them come out of discussions from the town halls I have had within my riding.

Bill C-33 will go before PROC at some point. We are being afforded an opportunity to make some positive changes, and I would encourage members to do that.

One idea is having more people engaged. I believe Bill C-33 talks about allowing teenagers to get on the voters list before they turn 18. I see that as a strong positive. Why would we not accept that? If we want more young people engaged, at least allow them to get on the voters list as opposed to waiting for the election to be called or after they turn 18. Opportunities—

• (1230)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I know my colleague is near the end of his time, and I could say mercifully, but he has spoken much about Bill C-33, which Parliament will debate at some point. He knows that as deputy House leader. It will come at some point whenever the Liberals decide to put it on the agenda. However, the opposition motion we are dealing with today is—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am not sure that is a point of order or a point of debate. I am going to have to let the hon. parliamentary secretary continue.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, other than a few Liberals who have spoken, to spend the entire time on a bill—

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will recognize the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. I would like him to go on a bit and we will see what it comes to.

• (1235)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, in the few Liberal speeches we have heard so far, all of their time is being spent talking about Bill C-33, which is a bill that is standing before Parliament at some point for debate. We look forward to that debate, and we will engage on all the issues about which my friend and other Liberals have talked.

The opposition motion today is very explicit. It is about the commitment on electoral reform, changing the voting system. Bill C-33 does not change the voting system. While they are tangentially connected as one is about voting and the other is about voting—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We have another point of order, but I am going to mention that I am sure the hon. member will get to what he is going to talk about or to the point we are discussing today.

I have heard many discussions take place in this honourable place. What often happens is we wonder how they are going to get tied together, and often the member brings it back together. It is kind of hard to judge. The hon. member does have a short time left to wrap it all up. I will leave it with him.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the word that comes to my mind is “hogwash”.

If the member listened to what was being said, and it is unfortunate he would not have been listening, he would have heard that it was absolutely 100% relevant to the debate we are having today. I would suggest the member needs to open his mind and listen to what is being said. It was relevant.

It is time the members across the way recognize that there is so much more we could be doing to improve the system. The portion that the member raised in his point of order was but a small portion of what I was actually speaking about.

I understand my time has expired. Hopefully the member will have the opportunity to ask a question, and make it relevant.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, relevant? How about the hon. member shows some class and dignity in this place, and when he is part of a government that has broken a black and white promise, he has the integrity, I believe is the word, to say “We broke the promise” as some Liberals have done and he has yet to do, and apologize for breaking a promise.

If the Liberals are so committed, as they campaigned on and have since championed, to being the defenders of democracy, one of the core principles of democracy is that people run on a platform, which is their commitment to the voters that they will do this thing. That is their mandate.

The mandate does not come from a letter, by the way, scratched out by Gerry Butts or whoever in the Prime Minister's office. That is not a mandate. The mandate comes from one place and one place only, the Canadian people. The Canadian people gave the government a mandate to change the voting system. That was the promise.

All this motion does today, and it is quite simple and I am sure my friend can grab hold of this one, is say that when a party and its members make a promise and when a Prime Minister repeats the promise in the throne speech and hundreds of times since, if it is to mean anything at all, and if any future promises are to hold any weight with Canadians, when that promise is explicitly broken, they admit it, they apologize, and then they work to restore the faith that has been broken.

My question for my friend is this. Why not apologize? Why not do the right thing? Why not admit to what everybody knows, that he and his party broke a sacred promise to Canadians to change the voting system in Canada, full stop?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before the parliamentary secretary answers, I just want to remind the hon. members that sometimes the speeches get borderline disrespectful. I want to remind them to keep in mind that our rules do ask us to be respectful of one another.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what Canadians voted for and gave to the Prime Minister was a majority mandate of good governance, of being able to make good sound decisions. What the member across the way needs to appreciate is that a good prime minister will in fact listen to what Canadians have to say. I believe the Prime Minister of Canada has accurately reflected what Canadians are thinking on this issue. He indicated that in a mandate letter that was issued to the Minister of Democratic Institutions.

In case the member did not hear, this is what the Prime Minister indicated, “A clear preference for a new electoral system, let alone a consensus, has not emerged.” The Prime Minister was right in making that decision. Therefore, I will not apologize. In fact, if anyone should be apologizing, from my perspective, given what has taken place in the last few minutes, it might be the member across the way.

• (1240)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am reminded of the Elton John song *Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word*, and we are certainly hearing that from the government today.

Perhaps I can set an example here. I would like to offer my own apology. Earlier today in the House I made the statement that the Liberal government had broken 23 solemn promises that it made in its electoral platform. I was wrong. I mislead the House with that number. The number is actually 29. I will apologize for having misrepresented the number of promises the Liberal government has broken. It was 29, not 23. This is confirmed by a website, but I cannot use the name of it because it includes the Prime Minister's last name. People are paying attention. They are tracking the promises the Liberal Party and the government made.

Will the member follow my example and apologize for having broken 29 promises in less than 500 days?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that comment did nothing other than demonstrate the member's math is not that great.

There is no way the member can convince me that 29 promises were broken. I suspect a gross exaggeration might be taking place. If he wants to give a genuine apology, maybe he should stand in his place and apologize to Canadians for giving an impression that is just not true. I suspect, as an example, he would say “the middle class” and we would say that the middle class of Canada was doing quite well with the commitments this government provided, whether it was tax breaks or a litany of other commitments that were made and kept.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Before I start, I have to say that I am absolutely flabbergasted by the ducking, the weaving, the dodging, and the deflection I have seen from the member for Winnipeg North.

I am also flabbergasted, because I am the father of four-year-old twin daughters who know that when they break a promise, they say they are sorry. What I have witnessed today is that I have four-year-olds who have more sense and more respect than the Government of Canada. That is a shameful thing.

I want to begin by repeating, again, because I just cannot say this enough, and neither can any of us in going over the Liberal broken promises, the fact that in June 2015, the Prime Minister made an explicit promise to Canadians that 2015 would be the last election conducted under the first past the post voting system and that a bill would be presented to the House within 18 months of forming government.

This was repeated in December, when a commitment was made in the throne speech, probably one of the most sacred speeches outlining a government's plans for the nation:

To make sure that every vote counts, the Government will undertake consultations on electoral reform, and will take action to ensure that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system.

I checked the liberal.ca website. I am not sure if it has changed, but as of 11:30 a.m. today, it still says, “We are committed to ensuring that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under... first-past-the-post”. It is still up there.

I also had time to look at the new mandate letter to the new Minister of Democratic Institutions. The Prime Minister had the audacity in the opening lines of that letter to say, “We promised Canadians real change—in both what we do and how we do it”. It went on to say, “I made a personal commitment to bring new leadership and a new tone to Ottawa”. Then we get to the crux of the letter: “Changing electoral reform will not be in your mandate”.

That just makes a mockery of the Prime Minister's words, an absolute mockery. The new minister actually made a call to my friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley the day before the announcement was made, and everything looked like it was still on course. Then we were presented with a political deception of the highest order when the news was broken, and I think the sense of betrayal we felt was really profound.

We have a Prime Minister who obviously broke a promise, who obviously misled Canadians and the House, and who did not tell the truth. There are Canadians who have a word to describe such a

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person. We cannot use it in the House, but trust me, from the correspondence I have received from my constituents and from people across the country, that word is being used a lot out in the public.

I want to read into the record some of the correspondence I have received from some of my constituents, and I will start with this quote: “I was really upset when I heard what the PM had to say about no change in electoral reform.... I guess that is putting it politely. I was actually furious! All that work from the [electoral reform] committee, seemingly for nothing.”

Another quote: “I'm appalled that [the Prime Minister] has abdicated on his promise to make 2015 the last election under first-past-the-post. Thousands of Vancouver Island citizens spoke up at public consultations, canvassed voters, researched the issue and wrote letters to the editor. We all wanted a form of proportional representation, and we weren't alone”.

These are from copies my office received of letters sent to the Prime Minister.

“Your failure to keep this commitment is a betrayal to the many voters who were counting on you to fix our broken voting system”.

Another quote: “Canadians need to feel included and represented in their politics, and if you choose not to include this in your mandate, you and the Liberal Party of Canada will be further alienating this and other groups which feel unrepresented by the political parties of Canada. Please do not make this mistake”.

All of us on this side of the House, and I am sure many of my Liberal colleagues as well, are getting correspondence like this. Canadians are profoundly disappointed about this, because a promise was made that was black and white.

● (1245)

What is the word of the Prime Minister worth anymore? How can we trust him on other fundamental issues, like the great social change we need to see, the social contract with our veterans, how we look after our seniors, and what we are going to do with the retirement age? He keeps referring us to the Liberal website. There are still promises there that he does not intend to keep.

I also want to mention that we have an online petition, which I believe two weeks ago was sitting at about 6,000 signatures and has now surpassed 92,000 signatures. The petition is making history.

With my friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, I was honoured to substitute on the electoral reform committee while it was doing its cross-country tour. I sat on it for the Atlantic Canada tour. I was really impressed with the correspondence the committee received and the feedback from experts and Atlantic Canadians.

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I remember specifically, when I was in Prince Edward Island, in Charlottetown, when we had the former commissioner responsible for the plebiscite in Prince Edward Island appear. He warned the committee to beware of the vested interests, those who want to see the present system maintained because it benefits them. He told a story about how when the recommendation in Prince Edward Island was to go to a proportional system, both the Liberal and Conservative parties of that province realized that it might upset their hold on power, and they both secretly campaigned against it in church basements and community halls in the province. They deliberately undermined the work of that important committee.

As we have heard time and again, nearly 90% of the experts and 80% of the members of the public who testified called on the government to implement a proportional representation system.

On the other side, in addition to all the deflection the Liberals have been promoting in the House, I have also tried to set up a straw-man argument. The Prime Minister, during question period, once said that a proportional system would give rise to alt-right parties and dangerous fringe elements in the House, while conveniently forgetting that the first past the post system in the United States just elected Donald Trump.

Yes, there could be fringe elements elected, but I tend to believe that the best disinfectant for those kinds of policies is sunshine. Bring them into the House. Make them defend their ideas. We, on the moderate side of the House, will just as quickly knock them down.

When Canadians vote, they should expect to have every vote count equally. Our present system is nowhere close to that. We have a system that allows 39% of the electorate to give a party 100% of the power. Make no mistake, when we have a majority government in the House, it is essentially an elected dictatorship. The fact that 39% of the Canadians who voted have sway over so much of our policy is profoundly undemocratic.

We need to encourage more participation and broaden participation in this country, not lessen it. This was a golden opportunity that was missed by the government.

Respect and trust in politics are finite resources, and they can be used up really quickly. Cynicism can be like a cancer. If unchecked, it can grow exponentially. The Prime Minister's actions last week, and indeed the continuing ability of the Liberal Party to not apologize for its actions, is growing cynicism in the country at an alarming rate.

I am profoundly saddened that the Liberal Party, the government, is deflecting and dodging the essence of our motion today. Why will the Liberals not act like adults? Why will they not show the same level of respect my four-year-olds have, admit that they misled the House and misled Canadians, and simply apologize?

• (1250)

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too held a town hall in my riding and spoke with lots of my constituents. We had quite a variety of commentary, whether it be for proportional or for any kind of system. We also had a lot of people who were screaming for a national referendum. However, the majority of people who came through did not want a national

referendum. That is what I heard time and time again from Liberal Party members, from the NDP members, and from the Green Party. They did not want a national referendum.

I am having a problem trying to understand how, after we gave up the majority on our committee, for the first time, to do the right thing, we ended up with a recommendation calling for a national referendum. I would like to know how my colleague across can explain that to me.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I think I need to give my friend a little bit of a lesson on the definition of reaching consensus. In this place, with 338 members of Parliament, representing different major parties, we sometimes have to drop some provisions to work together.

I was on that committee. It was the Liberals who were holding everything up. The fact that the NDP and the Conservatives could come together, that the Bloc and the Greens could come together, and reach an agreement said something. We made the process work.

That member is deflecting from the real issue of this motion. I simply want them to admit that they misled Canadians, with a fundamentally black and white promise, and apologize.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous intervention was particularly troublesome. To suggest that the government side gave up the majority on a committee, and then to act with dismay when the committee, on which they lacked a majority, did not give them exactly what they wanted or exactly what they preferred and it was somehow the committee's fault, really takes a special type of arrogance.

I would be interested to hear my friend's comments on what the committee's work was about and the arrogance with which such a suggestion could be made.

• (1255)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question, because having had the honour of sitting on that committee for the short time I was there, for those four days, I was really amazed by the passion with which we all got involved, even ordinary Canadians. I think this was one of those golden moments in Canada's history. So many people got caught up in the possibility of reform.

Yes, there were a variety of opinions held on what system would be best for Canada. That is what democracy is, but the fact is that we had a committee that was set up roughly in proportion to the number of votes each of those parties received. A majority of the parties on that committee reached a consensus and had a clear recommendation for the government. That is all that needs to be said.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the committee was formed, it went from coast to coast to coast doing unbelievably hard work and taking time away from families to listen to many citizens across Canada on this issue.

They found out that nearly 90% of the experts and 80% of the members of the public who testified called on the government to adopt a proportional electoral system.

Business of Supply

The Liberals got 100% of power but only 39% of the vote. Does he feel that there is a clear consensus on what people wanted on electoral reform, and does he feel that there was a clear consensus in what the people were saying?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is yes, absolutely. I do feel that we reached a consensus.

The committee's report is extremely detailed and elaborates on all of the testimony received by the committee. I feel strongly about the work put in not only by the committee but also members of Parliament throughout the chamber, who took the time to hold town hall meetings and consult with their constituents, like the minister did. So much money and effort was put into this venture and to have it end the way it did has caused a real sense of betrayal. I cannot say it any better than that.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of those who may be listening at home, I will remind the House that the motion we are debating today states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government misled Canadians on its platform and Throne Speech commitment “that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system”, and that the House call on the government to apologize to Canadians for breaking its promise.

It is a simple motion in response to a simple act. The Liberals announced last Wednesday that they simply would not be following through on their commitment. It was a clear commitment and it clearly demands an apology to the House and Canadians.

I rose in the House last spring on an optimistic note. The Liberals made that commitment in the election campaign, repeated it in the throne speech, and then proceeded to drag their heels in getting the process started. Incidentally, they later argued that they did not have enough time to change the voting system, but they burned up six months sitting around to come up with the lame idea of having an ordinary committee study the issue. How it takes six months to come up with the idea of establishing a regular committee with a government majority, I do not know. Neither did Canadians nor the media, and that is why it was panned broadly.

Last spring, I was pleased to rise when the government saw fit to act on a good idea, which was the NDP idea to have an all-party committee where the government would not have a majority. It seemed that maybe this was a step forward, that maybe the government after all was serious about following through on that election and throne speech commitment. That was an optimistic time, but since then, a lot has happened. It seemed at times that we were moving in the right direction and then there were setbacks.

For instance, last October, it felt like a setback when, all of a sudden, the Prime Minister, who had said many times in the House that 2015 would be the last election under first past the post, said in an interview, “Under Mr. Harper, there were so many people who were unhappy with the government and his approach that people said, ‘We need electoral reform in order to stop having governments we don’t like.’”

Essentially, he was saying that if it works for him, it must be working for Canadians, and when it works for people he does not like, then there is a problem. That felt like a setback. That felt like the Prime Minister was moving away from his commitment.

Later, on December 2, hope sprang again, because the Prime Minister stated, “I make promises because I believe in them. I’ve heard loudly and clearly that Canadians want a better system of governance, a better system of choosing our governments, and I’m working very hard so that 2015 is indeed the last election under first past the post.”

The Liberals have since said that there was no consensus. That sounds to me like the Prime Minister was saying there was a consensus that we need to make a change. When there is that kind of consensus for a change which, granted, is not the same as consensus on a solution, what people expect from their government is leadership to put forward a proposal that might actually move us forward. We are still waiting on the proposal. They have announced they are not keeping the promise and we never even heard what the proposal would be.

It surely was not for lack of consultation, because members on all sides of the House went into their own constituencies and talked to their constituents. The committee travelled across the country and talked to Canadians and experts. Over 80% of Canadians who spoke to the committee said they wanted a proportional system and over 90% of the experts said that a proportional system was the best for Canada.

Then we heard all sorts of possible solutions, possible voting systems, and possible proposals. The government had but to pick one and put it to Canadians, but before it could be bothered to do that, it said it simply was not going to go ahead with its promise. That is pretty sad, particularly coming from a Prime Minister who, in the last election, said he was the one who was going to ride into the House of Commons on his white horse, clean up the cynicism in Canadian politics, that he would be the one to show Canadians there is a better way, that he would inspire young people to get involved in politics and affirm the value of electing different governments, because different governments could behave differently. Believe me, that is not the only example.

Last Wednesday was the most cut and dried example of the Prime Minister walking away from that message of hope. In a week, well over 90,000 Canadians have signed an online petition calling on the government to keep its promise. That is not 90,000 people in the rinky-dink way that they set up the My Democracy survey, where we do not know if they live in Canada, and do not know if they signed up many times, because the e-petition system, unlike the government's lame survey, actually has integrity.

● (1300)

We know that over 90,000 individual Canadians have signed that e-petition and are calling on the government to keep its promise. Instead, today the Liberals are standing up and shamefully saying that not only are they going ahead with breaking that promise, but they do not even have what it takes to apologize for going ahead with that. Then we are told that it is the government that is going to bring an end to cynicism.

Business of Supply

Let us look at the Liberals' excuses for breaking that promise. At the time that they decided to break it last week, the initial answer was that there is not consensus. We certainly heard that from Liberals here today, although I say they cannot have consensus on a proposal they never made, so there is something structurally wrong with that argument. If they had actually proposed something and could not reach a consensus on that, then they might have a case, although we do not even know what the threshold for consensus is. Is it a vote in the House of Commons? Is it a referendum? Is it how many retweets they get when they put it out on Twitter? We do not know. The government has not said.

There is an issue with saying that they do not have consensus when they have not tried, but there is also an issue with a government that says it needs to have consensus, whatever that means. I do not know if that means every Canadian in the country has to agree on one thing before we go ahead with it. The Liberals certainly did not think they needed consensus to break promises, so it is an interesting inversion. If they were to go and talk to most Canadians, they would say that a government can go ahead and implement the election promises that it has a mandate to implement, and if it wants to break those promises, then it should be looking for consensus from Canadians, who could say that something has changed since the election, something has changed since they decided to cast their ballot for the Liberals and so they agree that the government needs to break this promise. Instead the Liberals are going around breaking promises all over the place without consensus, and then saying they need consensus just to keep the promises they made during the election. I cannot be the only one who thinks that is completely backwards.

For instance, when the Liberals said they would not approve new pipelines without a new process and then went ahead and approved at least three pipelines under the old Harper process which they ran against, that to me seems like something they might have sought consensus on. I do not think they would have found it if they had sought consensus on that. But the Liberals do not think they need consensus to break their promises, only to keep them. They did not seek consensus when they launched an attack on defined benefit pensions in this country by tabling Bill C-27, and that was not even an election commitment.

The idea that somehow the Liberals are bound by consensus is ridiculous. If they really felt that they needed consensus from Canadians to move forward with important initiatives, they would do that particularly in the context where they are breaking promises. That was laughable. I do not think anyone in Canada is buying the idea that simply because there was not consensus, when the government never even so much as tried to build it around a particular proposal, somehow that is an excuse for breaking a cut and dried promise.

Then there was the leak to the Huffington Post that maybe this was not about the lack of consensus; maybe this was about the growing threat of the alt-right and this was really about Prime Minister Trudeau standing up against the alt-right and making sure it could not sneak in. But the fact of the matter is, and members have said it before—

• (1305)

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe a point of order was made by the hon. member for Ajax, and I have to admit that I heard it too. We are not allowed to name the members in the House, and I believe the hon. member, not on purpose, mentioned the Prime Minister's name as opposed to referring to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. My passion for the issue got the better of me on that. If the government kept its promises, I would be less inclined to name them in the House.

We heard that this was really about defending Canadians, about the alt-right. Except we know that in the south they just got one of the alt-right guys in there under a first past the post system. We also know that the government that the Prime Minister was so keen to say that Canadians did not like and did not want and was the reason for which we needed a changed voting system, got in under the first past the post system.

Mark my words, when this Prime Minister is gone, and it may not take as long as the Liberals think, and the next right-wing prime minister gets in here in Canada with less than 40% of the vote, that will be on this Prime Minister's head.

Shame on the Liberals. Let us hear the apology.

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, I am struggling to reconcile the difference between what I found when I did my consultations and what the Liberals found. I did not find any consensus, but listening to members across the aisle, it is clear that they found consensus.

What do we know for sure? We know that there have been a number of referendums in different provinces across our country seeking to change the system. In the referendum in Ontario mixed member proportional was proposed and two-thirds of the people voted against it. Fair enough. There was a different referendum for a single transferable vote in British Columbia, where 40% of the people said yes to a single transferable vote and 60% said no thanks. Just last year a plebiscite was done in Prince Edward Island. The province wanted to hear what everybody thought. Twenty-two per cent of the people wanted dual member. Mixed member received 29% and first past the post received 31%.

I was not able to find a consensus in my riding. The NDP seem to find a very strong consensus in all of their ridings. We disagree there. How do we reconcile that with what we know took place with all of these different referendums? What leads you to believe today that you are correct to say you see there is suddenly this great consensus?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure the hon. member is not seeking my opinion. I am sure he means the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, so we will let him go ahead.

Business of Supply

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, in the first referendum in B.C., actually 58% of the people voted for change, but the government had set an artificial supermajority. That is why the first referendum in B. C. failed. The reason P.E.I. had such low thresholds, and the member is quoting people's first preference, was that it had an alternate ballot. The result of that referendum was a call for mixed member proportional representation, which the Liberal government in P.E.I. decided to ignore. There are some similarities. It is not in respect to what people want. It is the behaviour of Liberal governments.

Part of my speech, if the member had been listening, was the idea that somehow we need a unanimous consensus in order to proceed with electoral reform. That was not the promise of the government. The Liberals did not say they were going to get every Canadian to agree on the exact same system and then move forward with change. They said they were trying to build a mandate to change the system. They received it. Over 60% of Canadians voted for a party in the last election that said that we need to change the system.

Enough with the red herrings. Let us get on with the apology.

• (1310)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's passion on this issue. In the last election many people in my riding who traditionally vote NDP or Green Party voted Liberal because of a clear promise made by the Prime Minister on electoral reform. I would never say it or infer it in the House, but there are a lot of Canadians, including many in my riding, who feel that they were deliberately lied to.

Does the member think that the Prime Minister deliberately lied to Canadians?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, this has been a tumultuous process since the last election and there have been times when it really did seem like the government was trying to manoeuvre out of its promise early on. Due to the good work of opposition parties who thought that the government should not be able to easily abandon its promises to Canadians, and even though there were some pretty serious disagreements, we were able to work together on a path forward to get a concrete proposal, one that respected what Canadians told the committee they want, one that respected what experts testified was best for Canada, and then we came up with a proposal on how to move forward on a process.

We have a situation here where the opposition parties together have provided far more leadership on the government's campaign promise than the government itself has. If in that context the government cannot find a way to keep its own promise, then I do not know in what context it possibly could.

I am not at liberty to say whether someone lied or not in the House, but Canadians can draw their own conclusions from the facts, and they are compelling.

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to rise in this House and get an opportunity to speak.

I want to start by thanking all of the members in the House who were involved in the special committee and, indeed, all members

who held town hall meetings and discussions about electoral reform with their constituents.

More than 170 members in this House did hold town halls, as well as the then minister of democratic reform and now Minister of Status of Women, and so did I when I was the parliamentary secretary. I had the occasion to go to more than 80 different town halls and events across the country to listen to Canadians on their ideas on electoral reform and what they wanted.

Certainly, we heard three things.

One was from a group of people who were extremely passionate about change, and that came in many different forms. They wanted MMP, STV, alternative vote, pure proportional, or some other system such as ranked pairs.

Second was from a group of people who were incredibly passionate for the status quo. These people believed that our existing democracy was working well. They were incredibly strident about the fact that change would be bad. They were concerned about a rise of extremist voices, particularly at this point in time, and were worried about even more power being given to parties and leaders, as often happens in some of the systems, and they were very opposed.

Third, there was a small subsection of the population that was incredibly engaged and did show up. In the case of the parliamentary committee, there was an organized effort to have those opinions brought in.

However, as I went into ridings and talked to folks, I heard that a lot of people were not engaged on this issue. They thought there were other issues that should be dominating the mind and attention of Parliament.

As we moved forward, it became clearer and clearer that consensus did not exist. It was certainly recognized that the effort to pull things together to create a national imperative on this issue would dominate the national attention, and it would do so, I think, to the detriment of a lot of other essential issues in front of this House.

A case in point would be the committee itself. The committee did phenomenal work. I think it worked exceptionally well in trying to bring together all the disparate ideas and views on changing our electoral system. Yet, when we look at the report of the committee itself, we see it could not get to the point of a recommendation. I know members will say that it did, but let us take a look at the recommendations that were made.

First, there was a recommendation that there be a referendum on whether or not proportionality should be pursued. I have yet to hear a Conservative in this House stand and speak in favour of a proportional system. They are not advocating on behalf of a proportional system, and I think it is fair to say that the Conservatives would campaign vociferously against a proportional system. The Conservatives said that they wanted a referendum, and we know where they would campaign on that referendum. On the NDP side, NDP members very reluctantly said that they wanted a referendum, but in their dissenting report, they said that they did not want a referendum, and I would actually agree with them on that.

Business of Supply

I think it became clear that the only path forward with that lack of consensus would have been entertaining something like a national referendum on electoral reform, and I have two fundamental concerns with that.

The first concern is not only how much time, energy, and money it would cost but how diverting it would be for the issues of the nation that are most pressing, be they the economy, trade, our relationship with the United States, or national security. To place a national referendum on this issue I think would have been incredibly irresponsible.

Second, and this to me is the bigger point, we have a democracy that is representative. We are elected to represent our constituents. In fact, the Referendum Act only contemplates referendums in a situation of constitutional change. Therefore, we would have to actually change the act in order to have a referendum in a different way. We have to be very careful about that and think if it would lead to other consequences.

In a referendum, a majority opinion on an issue such as minority rights, let us say, would be abhorrent to us, and I think it would be contradictory to the charter. The idea that we would have a referendum, for example, on whether or not women would have the right to vote or whether or not same-sex couples would be allowed to marry would make no sense.

• (1315)

When we look at a referendum in this context, we see that the majority deciding on minority voting rights or how the minority might be represented in a system would be incredibly problematic. We have to ask where it would go next.

In a broader sense, we have the opportunity here to look at how we can strengthen and improve our democracy—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to interrupt the hon. member for few moments. I just want to remind the members of the House again that there is a process. You wait until the hon. member finishes his speech, then you stand up, the Speaker recognizes you, and then you ask your questions. Shouting across the floor is not the method we use in the House. I just want to remind everyone, just in case they forgot.

The hon. member for Ajax.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, what I did find as I went across the country was, while there was not consensus on the idea of changing the system, there was enormous passion about our democracy and an enormous consensus that we need to do all we can to improve it.

On that basis, certainly we heard near unanimity on needing to repeal many of the measures that were found in the unfair elections act. Let me give some examples: the idea that the Chief Electoral Officer could not promote elections to adults, could not go out there and advocate for people getting to vote; the issue of people who were disenfranchised by not being able to use a voter information card; the issue around vouching; the issue of getting young people registered on the voters' list so that they are ready to vote when they become of age, so they are given the resources so they can turn out to vote. That was a particular issue, when we know the turnout for those who are under 30 is so low.

We also wanted to expand the rights of Canadians voting abroad. In many cases they were completely shut out from the ability to have a say in their own democracy. A citizen is a citizen is a citizen, and no matter where Canadians reside, certainly they should have the opportunity to have a say on the future of their democracy and how their nation is governed.

We know the issue of cybersecurity, particularly as we watched it unfold in the U.S. election, was of incredible import. Therefore the minister, in the new mandate letter, has been given specific authority to tackle that issue and ensure that our cybersecurity is in place to protect Canadian democracy and, indeed, the affairs of all parties.

The point is that, while there is not consensus on a change of system, there is a lot of area of common ground where we could work together to make our democracy stronger. I listened to those consultations that happened across the country and the voices that were there, to the people who passionately felt that they were not heard and the people passionately feeling that a change in system would push them away from being heard or create problems beyond what we have today, and this is the most prudent path forward.

For a responsible government, the objective should be to take a look at what the agenda is, do the research, do the work, do the engagement, and then ascertain the best path forward. In the next election, what is essential for me when I go and face my constituents for the sixth time—and I have been successful most of the time; I was not in 2011, and some members were excited about that, although I was not.

The reality is that I have to be able to go back and feel good about the decisions I made, feel that I listened to constituents, that I took an objective view of the facts, that I did what was expected of me in a representative democracy, which is to sit and deliberate, and to listen. To the best of my ability, I tried to do that.

I can say to this House that there was not a path forward for change. I lament that. I wish there was. What I can say is that we can do better and our democracy can be stronger. There are many areas where we can and will improve. As a government, we are firmly fixed on those. I feel very comfortable going back to my constituents and having that dialogue.

• (1320)

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring the discussion back on track.

During the 2015 election, I attended 12 community debates and three high school debates, and my Liberal colleague sat beside me and at every one of those sessions talked about the importance of moving forward with democratic reform.

Last summer I went out and did a 14-community tour where I talked to constituents about democratic reform. A number of them asked me if I was sure this was actually going to happen. I said that the Liberals promised it was going to happen and that we were just talking about what it was going to look like, not whether or not we were going to get there.

My question to the member is this. When is a promise not a promise? If a promise is broken, should there not be an apology?

Business of Supply

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, this was indicative of part of the challenge that we faced as we went around the country. There certainly were constituencies where there was passionate support for some form of change, often at a very broad level, something like proportionality. However, then there was enormous difference even inside of that about what the proportionality would mean. The problem was that, as I went to other constituencies, including my own, there were very strong voices that said they had no interest in moving to any form of proportionality and if we went in that direction, it would be detrimental to our democracy; they said it is a bad idea, so do not do it.

I think that what a responsible government, a responsible legislator, does is listen. When we apply legislation, it is not a battering ram. We do not say damn the torpedoes and do not listen to anything but just ram it through. I do not think that is being responsible.

The idea of being responsible is taking a look at what the field of opportunity is to act. How much are we going to have to expend on other issues in terms of political capital to get it done, and how much does the population want it relative to other issues? I do not think spending the next three years talking about electoral reform would serve my constituents or the nation more broadly. The answer is to make the system the best we can without engaging in an all-out divisive fight over what system we are going to go with. That is why we landed here.

There is much we can do, and we should focus on that, but the major attention of the House has to be on trade, jobs, the border, and national security. I would have faced an enormous backlash if we had done any differently.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say that constituents in Thornhill, like those in Ajax, before the 2015 election showed very little interest in electoral reform, and during the committee's work over the roller coaster ride of the last year, waiting for a majority recommendation, were only conditional in hoping that there would be a referendum for whatever system was recommended.

The mood in my riding at least and from media across the country, is that of anger, disappointment, and disillusionment that the promise has been broken, among all the other promises. This broken electoral reform promise would seem to be emblematic of the way voters are feeling about the government.

It would seem from talking to those in my riding that I lost about 4% of my popular vote. It slipped down to 59% due to voter crossover to the Liberals in the last election. They are angry and disappointed, but more so are the large numbers of NDP voters who believed the government on a number of issues, electoral reform included, and the young voters. There is a strong possibility that the Liberals will see electoral revenge wreaked upon them in the 2019 election.

Some members of the government have apologized. The member for Spadina—Fort York has apologized and is taking quite a beating on Facebook. However, the government House leader and the Prime Minister have refused. I wonder if the member for Ajax would apologize to his constituents and to all Canadians on behalf of the government for breaking the promise on electoral reform.

● (1325)

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I lament that a path forward was not possible, but responsible leadership is taking a look at the facts and making a decision that is best for constituents. I absolutely feel that is what we have done.

It is a bit confusing. The member is saying his constituents are not in favour of electoral reform, do not want it, but then he wants a referendum so he can, what, campaign against it? That does not make sense. It is divisive. It is unnecessarily costly and it would pull us away from the matters on which we should be focusing.

When the Conservatives say they want a referendum, but they do not want change, do they want a referendum so they can campaign against it? It is an illogical supposition.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to join the debate. I want to thank my hon. colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for introducing today's motion.

For me, it is always important to join the debate, particularly on issues of democracy. When I became a member of Parliament, I deliberately chose this topic for my inaugural speech in this place. Therefore, it is always a pleasure to come back to this topic, which I hold quite dearly. I have always tried to contribute to this place by having an engaged debate with my colleagues, and to contemplate the many different points of view that are reflected in debates that relate to our democratic practices.

I want to stress to colleagues that, at the core of this issue that is before us, and as part of this government, one of the things that is central for us is our ambitious agenda. We have been very ambitious in terms of our expectations for ourselves and for Canadians. This was also reflected in the aggressive platform we advanced in 2015. I recognize that when we are dealing with something as ambitious as what we were attempting to put forth, sometimes when we get into government there is the practical reality of some of the issues we have to face, and we have to look at the evidence before us and then to reconsider whether there is an appropriate path forward.

I want to get my comments out to those who are concerned about the recent decision we made that there is no path forward with respect to changes to the voting system, and make some recommendations as to how we could do this in a different way, and how we can create a process that depoliticizes what has become a highly politicized conversation.

First and foremost, when we are talking about something as fundamental as changing the voting system, we have to create a timeline and a process that can be achieved. It has to be done in such a way that it makes it less partisan. To some degree I acknowledge that from the government side there was probably a flaw in the process. In trying to do this within one electoral cycle, and the fact that we did it through a process of consultation and a committee of parliamentarians, it has become a highly charged partisan process. That is not helpful in getting to a consensus position on a change to our elections system.

Business of Supply

My recommendation for those who continue to advocate for that change would be to do so through a process that takes it out of our hands as politicians and puts it in the hands of a panel of constitutional experts or possibly a constituent assembly, as was suggested for Ontario, and was the process that was followed in 2007, to come up with a binary question, such as, “We have the current system, and this is the other system that we are proposing to consider”, and to do so in such a way that it has a timeline and a time frame that takes it out of our hands as politicians, who have a vested interest in the outcome, whether there is a change or no change. That would be my recommendation for those who are very passionate about changing our voting system.

I have not had the opportunity to catch all of the debates. I sit on the Standing Committee for Procedure and House Affairs, which is charged with looking at changes to the Canada Elections Act. However, prior to us meeting as a committee, I had the opportunity to listen to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, who stressed what I think was a really important point, and which I said at the beginning of my debate: here will be times where we will have strong disagreement on particular points of view, including on the path to move democratic change forward.

● (1330)

The point of this place is to have those kinds of conversations, and from my perspective, we have to distill those kinds of conversations. At the end of the day, when it comes to democratic reform, we should still be driven by what is in the public interest, to the benefit of all Canadians.

I want to do a shout-out to all my colleagues on the procedure and House affairs committee. We generally work very well, on a consensus basis, moving forward on most items, where we are trying to make participation in our democratic process better, and trying to remove barriers to democratic participation, where possible. Of course, there are going to be instances where we do not agree. We have done so. We set those kinds of issues aside. However, we will ultimately come with the lens of what do we have to do and what will it take to make Canadians, or our citizens as a whole, feel that this place and our democracy belong to all of us, not to a particular set of narrow partisan interests.

I apply that particular lens to moving forward on democratic change. My friend from Ajax, the parliamentary secretary for public safety, most aptly noted we have moved forward on Bill C-33 with a number of changes to undo some of the aspects of the so-called Fair Elections Act of the previous Parliament that made it more difficult for citizens to more fully participate in the democratic process. He has already laid out what those elements happen to be, so I will not repeat them, but that is exactly the kind of work we are doing. It is difficult work, but it is work that we have to continue to push forward at all times. It is work that I know the Minister of Democratic Institutions will continue to do on further aspects of strengthening our democracy and looking at continuing challenges to our democratic practices. Whether it is with respect to our fundraising rules or the possibility of external threats to our democratic system, we have to constantly work at it together in order to further strengthen our democracy.

As the member for Ajax noted, many of us held town hall meetings. I held a town hall in the electoral district of Scarborough—Agincourt, where I heard from constituents on a wide range of concerns they had with the democratic system and with the potential changes to our voting regime. Like him, I heard divergent views. There were those who wanted to keep the current system, those who wanted proportional representation, and those who wanted a different system, like a mixed member proportional system that we might see in places like Switzerland or Germany. As we can see, there is a wide range of possible electoral systems that are available to us. The only caution I would add to that is, regardless of what system someone wants to advance, we need to keep it within the context that we operate within a British parliamentary Westminster model.

I am going to table my particular bias. I have always strongly favoured the democratic accountability that each of us as members has to the single member constituency model that we have. A number of the other systems, whether they are blended systems or proportional representation systems, particularly in closed list systems, would erode that level of accountability if we were to adopt those particular systems. It would be highly detrimental to the system of democracy that we have developed here, following the Westminster model. Regardless of the changes we try to make to make things better and more participatory for our citizens in the democratic process, I have always believed strongly in a system that has myself, as an elected representative, accountable to a specific constituency or body of individuals I have to answer to in an election. That is my bias, and that is the frame from which I come.

● (1335)

At the end of the day, it is that level of accountability that holds us each in this place, and I would be, and continue to be, of the view that that model is still one that serves us well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He talked about our accountability as the people's representatives. That is why I rise today: I speak for the disappointed people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. They are disappointed because many of them participated in the consultation. The vast majority of them said they want a system in which every vote counts.

They are also disappointed because, even though they chose me, in the weeks and months following the election, they were happy to have a government that prided itself on its new way of governing and doing politics. I rise today to tell the House that they are disappointed about the broken promises and the throne speech commitments that have been cast aside.

When my colleague talks about our accountability to voters, does that extend to apologizing for breaking promises and dishonouring commitments?

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous respect for my colleague on the other side.

Business of Supply

Let me also express that there is a measure of disappointment that we could not find a pathway forward. Governments are always faced with new information, new challenges, and new evidence that comes before it, and has to ultimately make certain choices.

Getting back to my earlier point about our ambitious agenda and our ambition for Canadians, we have made it very clear that we would consult broadly with Canadians, and that is exactly what we have done. I cannot think of more engagement on a particular topic than on this particular topic, whether it was with respect to the 170-odd members who had town halls, the consultation, the minister and the parliamentary secretary travelling across the country, or the special parliamentary committee that was formed to consult with Canadians on this particular issue.

As has been noted, we could not find an ultimate consensus. All the political parties have particularly driven views on what type of reform they would like to see, or lack thereof, and we have a particular partisan concern or perspective on the pathway forward. From my perspective, we saw a huge divergence of views. That does not necessarily, though, diminish our intent to still move forward on so many other aspects that would enfranchise our citizens in participating in our democracy.

• (1340)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for his excellent comments and my colleague from Ajax who did an immense amount of work on this issue for quite a long time.

It was disappointing to many of us that there was not consensus, but clearly, there was not consensus as to which way we should go on such an important project as changing the way we cast our votes in this country.

I do not see this as the end. We looked for consensus at this particular time; it was not there. If there are opportunities to strengthen the democratic process, I would like to hear some of those ideas from a member. I know that we are looking into those things as well, and I would like to hear from my colleague on some of those thoughts to go forward to strengthen the democratic process.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, the member for Humber River—Black Creek has been a mentor to me since I have had the privilege of joining her in the House.

The procedure and House affairs, the committee on which I sit, will be dealing with many things moving forward. As we know, we already have Bill C-33 before the House, and there are important elements in that which would certainly strengthen participation among our citizenry. In the minister's mandate letter are issues with respect to fundraising. That issue will likely emerge in legislation. We already have some of the toughest laws in the world on political fundraising, but this would make them even more stringent. We are going to be bringing forward other changes, for example, with respect to dealing with cybersecurity threats, again which is found in the minister's mandate letter.

Those are important issues that Canadians should have confidence in and will help address and alleviate any of the concerns they have about their participation.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

I am hearing a lot from the government side of the House yet again trying to change the channel, saying that we should forget about what was promised during the election and forget about what was promised in the throne speech, and talk about something else.

This is about a promise that was given. It is about a campaign focus. It is about what was written in the throne speech. I have heard from my constituents, and they want the Prime Minister to live up to that promise.

The Prime Minister repeated that promise hundreds of times in forums in communities across the nation. The media, since this change in course, this breaking of the promise, has been playing those back to Canadians. It is clear, over and over again, that this was to be the last “first past the post” election. It was heard over and over like a broken record. He committed in the last election, when a majority government was elected with less than 40% of the vote, that this would be the last election with first past the post. He officially committed that same promise December 2015 in the throne speech, which stated:

To make sure that every vote counts, the Government will undertake consultations on electoral reform, and will take action to ensure that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system.

He could not have been more definitive if he tried. This was not a promise, this was not an undertaking in a throne speech to reach out to Canadians and talk about what they thought about the democratic process. It was not an undertaking to reach out and maybe think about a couple of things, and maybe replace first past the post or maybe not. It was a clear, definitive commitment in the throne speech.

He then appointed a minister specifically mandated to deliver this charge. It was common knowledge that to deliver on this promise, the government had to expedite the necessary legislative reforms so the new voting system could be enacted, debated, and in place before the next election. The Chief Electoral Officer was very clear about when that deadline was.

The government stalled. Despite calls by the New Democrats to expedite the promised reforms, the committed reforms, finally, in May, eight months into her mandate, the minister struck a committee of members of Parliament to “identify and conduct a study of viable alternate voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system, as well as to examine mandatory voting and online voting”, and to “report no later than December 1, 2016”.

While the committee was originally composed of a majority of Liberal MPs, saying we are all in this together but not exactly, in the end the government caved and agreed to a New Democrat proposal to have the representatives based on votes.

Business of Supply

As Fair Vote Canada said on December 1 of last year, the first example of how the proportional representation system could work was the constitution of the electoral reform committee that was struck to end the first past the post system. In fact, the members worked together very well. They travelled together very well. They heard from a lot of experts and citizens. This is a prime example of how when there is actually a fair, proper system of selecting representations, good work is done.

Why was this important? Because how we elect representatives is a profound decision, impacting all voters, so the views of all voters would be considered and reflected in examination of any reforms in addition to this one.

The Prime Minister's minister implored all members of Parliament to reach out to our constituents and discuss how to proceed on this electoral reform to replace first past the post, and we did. We were co-operative little members of Parliament and we responded to the beck and call of the minister. We went across the country and held forums, had surveys, ten percenters, and we sought the input of Canadians.

This dedicated committee also spent the entire summer break and most of the fall diligently travelling to communities, consulting, listening to experts on alternative electoral voting reforms, and summarizing their findings. Many members of Parliament took it a step further and sought further written feedback.

● (1345)

The meeting I held in Edmonton on electoral reform was a standing room only event, with close to 300 participants. This is hardly an example of lack of interest in reforming the system to replace the first past the post.

I then reached out to constituents with a survey. More 280 took the time to respond, in depth, to our extensive survey on electoral reform. A large majority supported a system where every vote must count. A little over half called the adoption of a proportional representation system the route they would like to go. A lot of people also said that they would also like to have a referendum, and we agreed to a referendum but a referendum on proposals to actually replace first past the post. That was another promise broken.

Right up until February 1 this year, the Prime Minister and his minister claimed to still be committed to delivering on this promise and commitment.

On February 1, the Prime Minister sent his newest democratic reform minister out to break the news that he had decided to break this commitment. Worse, it was revealed that he had gone further and actually deleted an important part of the mandate for the Minister of Democratic Institutions, specifically saying that she would not pursue electoral reform. That was simply astounding.

The Prime Minister now claims that Canadians suddenly do not want electoral reform. Why did they come out to all those meetings? Why did they write those letters? Why did they call for reform if there were no consensus? How does he explain the hundreds who came out to the very town halls for which his minister called?

How does the Prime Minister explain the hundreds of Canadians who participated in the special committee consultation process?

Again, how much did that cost? How does he explain his broken promise after 80% of the public and 90% of the experts called for proportional representation? How does he explain the hundreds of Canadians who took the time to send written views? Does he still believe that suggests a lack of interest? How does he explain the over 90,000 Canadians to date signing a petition calling for him to deliver on his promise for electoral reform to end first past the post?

The only conclusion Canadians can draw is that because the Prime Minister's preferred reform, which incidentally would ensure a Liberal majority into the future, was not supported by Canadians, he decided to break his throne speech commitment. There is no other conclusion that anyone can draw.

It is well known that many came out to vote specifically and to vote Liberal based on the good faith that the Prime Minister would keep his word that he would end first past the post. With the little time I have left, I would like to share what some Edmontonians have said since this decision was made.

Here is a letter to the *Edmonton Journal*, February 3:

What a betrayal of the 9,093,630 (51.8 per cent) voters who elected no one in the October 2015 election. You must believe that 39 per cent of the votes is a legitimate majority. I guess I am expected to pay all my taxes, but elect no one. Some democracy.

We already see the cynicism building, and it is unfortunate.

An editorial in the *Edmonton Journal* on February 3 said:

Breaking your signature election promise to "make every vote count" is bad enough. But for Prime Minister...to announce he was breaking his vow to overhaul how Canadians vote by slipping the announcement into the mandate letter he sent to his new Minister of Democratic Institutions — suddenly a lame-duck portfolio — smacks of a cowardly breakup by text message.

Do the members of the government not understand how Canadians feel about how they are now being treated? Where are we supposed to find the continuing trust in any of the promises and commitments by the Prime Minister and the government?

We first saw the breaking of the promise of providing comparable, equal access to services to first nations children and families. We will get to it eventually. Then we see the breaking of this promise, which is written in black and white.

I look forward, as do my colleagues, to an apology for this break of faith.

● (1350)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we go on to questions and comments, I want to remind hon. members that debate is taking place and it is nice to see everyone getting along, but the conversation level is getting a little high. We want to keep it down out of respect.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Guelph.

Statements by Members

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we look forward toward a pathway to continue our discussions, I am working with my constituents who are working on a paper for me to present to the minister on their specific electoral reform suggestions. Also I am looking at presenting a petition in the House on their behalf, as members of Parliament do on a number of issues.

Does the hon. member feel her hands are tied in terms of continuing to work with her local constituents on their behalf under normal means within our parliamentary system?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I never feel that my hands are tied in trying to represent my constituents. That is why I took the time to share here how exasperated my constituents are with the breaking of this promise.

I would ask the member if he is also making available to his constituents the petition that more than 90,000 Canadians have already signed that says that the Prime Minister broke his promise and needs to deliver on that promise to end first past the post.

What are we going to continue to discuss? I am sure that we, on this side of the House, feel free to continue to discuss, but on the other side, are they going to defy their Prime Minister? Are they going to stand up in this place and say that the Prime Minister, their leader, broke his promise and they want him to change his mind and deliver on that promise?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I agree with almost everything my colleague said, particularly the observation that this was a commitment made by the Prime Minister during the last election campaign and that the commitment was broken.

The statement the Prime Minister made when he said that 2015 would be the last election under the first past the post system was not aspirational in nature. It was a firm commitment. It was something he made a definitive promise on. That is why so many people feel betrayed.

I would like to ask my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona if she is experiencing the same reaction in her riding that I am in mine. That seems to be that the voters who seem to feel most betrayed by this breaking of a commitment are the millennials, the young people who felt that finally they were going to be seeing a system they could actually engage in. They could have a voice in changing a fundamental system of our democracy. They are the ones I am finding feel most betrayed. I am wondering if my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona could comment on that.

• (1355)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, in all honesty, I am hearing not just from millennials. I am hearing from all constituents. People of all ages came out to my forums, and people of all ages took the time to write to me.

I am deeply concerned. Of course, we know that a lot of millennials came out this time, not just to vote but to actually get involved in campaigns and to endorse candidates. They believed the Prime Minister, and they have to be broken-hearted. It is really going to break their faith in getting involved in the process ever again.

When the Liberals say they are going to talk about something else on democracy, who is going to want to be involved? This is a serious break with the faith of Canadians, and particularly young Canadians.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for stressing the issue of a solemn promise that was broken. It was not just a solemn promise that was broken. It was a declaration in a throne speech. It has led to a deep dissatisfaction that is already causing people to come to us in office. They are telling us how disengaged they are now. If they were cynical before, there is deeper cynicism now.

More than that, I want to mention a constituent in my riding who demonstrates the depth of that cynicism. If we are going to move forward now, as some members from the governing party have suggested, and look at electoral reform, this constituent would like to see us consider demonstrating in this House the number of people who abstain from voting. That would mean that people who abstain from voting would be recognized by having vacant seats in this House. That to me demonstrates the understanding and conviction that every voice matters.

I wonder if the hon. member can respond.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a broader response to my colleague's question.

Right now, the Liberals are out there encouraging Canadians to consult on a broad array of topics, including, finally, on another promise they made, to immediately restore federal environmental laws. Who on earth out there who cares about that is going to take seriously that the government actually intends to respond and make substantive changes?

This has had a much more serious effect on the attitude of Canadians toward the federal government than people may have considered.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, *je me souviens*; I remember.

On February 5, 6, and 7, 1968, an important constitutional conference took place in Ottawa, where two conflicting visions clashed. The Premier of Quebec at the time, Daniel Johnson, stated, "Everyone here knows that French Canada is decidedly unhappy about its place in Confederation." He said, "equality or independence".

The other vision was that of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Trudeau's view was that French Canadians were not a nation; they were a minority among other minorities. They were not a founding nation, but rather a minority. It was not the rights of the Quebec nation that needed to be respected, but rather individual rights. Quebec, well, it is just a minority, a province like all the others.

Statements by Members

In the words of Pierre Bourgault, we no longer want to be a province that is unlike the others; we want to be a country that will be like the others.

* * *

● (1400)
[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 1 marked the beginning of Black History Month. I rise today to pay homage to the person who was instrumental in making this a reality, the hon. Jean Augustine.

In December 1995, the Parliament of Canada officially recognized February as Black History Month, thanks to Jean and her motion. Jean is the queen of many firsts. She was the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament and the first black Canadian woman appointed to cabinet. She served as a minister to prime ministers Chrétien and Martin and sat in the House of Commons as the MP for Etobicoke—Lakeshore from 1993 until 2005.

This trailblazer and educator is also an activist for women's rights and has worked tirelessly on anti-poverty initiatives and violence against women issues. This only begins to touch on the amazing things this Order of Canada recipient has given to the community and our country.

I have the honour to call her a mentor and friend. We thank Jean for her service. She is a tough act to follow.

* * *

IAN MOTHUS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today to speak on behalf of one of my constituents, and indeed, a great Canadian.

On January 10 of this year, Warrant Officer Ian Mothus passed away. Ian was a proud soldier and went to work wearing his pride for his job on his sleeve for all to see. Ian served for over 20 years, first in the infantry, then as a medic in the army, then, most recently, as a physician's assistant. He did multiple tours in Afghanistan and Kosovo. He served our country proudly, defending his fellow man and training Afghan soldiers in medical practice.

In life, Ian never sought attention or accolades. As a matter of fact, I was told that he avoided it at all costs.

Today I rise to pay tribute to him as a brother, as a son, and as a dedicated soldier who put his comrades and victims of war above and before himself, whose respect for the military and passion for the medical field will be a lasting legacy among those who served with him.

To his comrades, friends, and the entire Mothus family, our hearts are with them as they mourn and celebrate Ian.

* * *

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend a pillar of our community in

Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Mr. John Burton. This is a man who would work all week for the Boys & Girls Club in Dartmouth East and then get up at the crack of dawn on his weekend to volunteer for one of our many community events.

People may know John as the guy flipping and serving the eggs at the Kinsmen community breakfast on the fourth Sunday of every month. People may know him as the man making the pancakes for breakfast with Santa. I know John Burton as the man who is always the first to offer assistance to anyone.

We will miss him in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, as his work is now taking him to a regional position.

Please join me in commending John Burton for being one of Dartmouth's best volunteers.

* * *

[Translation]

MACAMIC AND LA REINE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to come from a young and dynamic region that was built by the fortitude and optimism of the men and women who chose to settle in Abitibi West just 100 years ago.

That is why I would like to share with the House that Macamic and La Reine will also be celebrating their centennial this year. Macamic, my husband's hometown, is Algonquin for "lame beaver" and means "lake of wonders" in Cree. The people of Macamic will pay tribute to their founders at the celebrations taking place from July 14 to 22.

My own beloved birthplace, La Reine, calls itself the capital of the end of the world. The residents of La Reine invite everyone to take part in the celebrations being held at the end of the world from July 27 to 30.

I am privileged to have inherited this strength from our pioneers and it is with great pride that I will be celebrating this heritage with the people of Abitibi West this summer.

* * *

[English]

DEMENTIA

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Alzheimer's and dementia are heartbreaking diseases that cause people to lose their independence, their dignity, and their very loved ones. They affect more than one-half million Canadians, and that number will go up.

To support those affected, we need to invest in research and better treatments, which is why I was proud to welcome the Minister of Health to my riding of Eglinton—Lawrence where we announced \$1.4 million in federal funding for the Canadian Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation at Baycrest Health Sciences.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

[Translation]

Baycrest is an institution known around the world for geriatric care and research, and especially for its contributions in the areas of cognitive neuroscience and aging.

[English]

I am a proud advocate for Baycrest, and I am proud that our government is committed to ensuring that those who suffer from Alzheimer's and dementia get the best health care we can afford.

* * *

FOREST IN BRANTFORD

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a new forest in my city. For the last five years, Brantford businesses, community groups, schools, charities, and residents have worked together to turn 65 unusable acres of land in the middle of an active industrial park into a forest of more than 50,000 trees. It is a healthy, burgeoning forest with more than four kilometres of walking trails, a thriving stream supporting aquatic life, abundant mammals, birds, and flourishing plant life. Prairie tall grass planted in elevated areas assists in sustaining the endangered ecosystem.

However, most important is the hard work of so many Brantford residents to make this happen. To the Brant Tree Coalition founder, Jim Berhalter, and Chuck Beach and his team, I give a huge shout out and thanks.

I invite all Canadians to stop by and take a walk through Brantford's beautiful forest in the city.

* * *

SUDBURY SUPERSTACK

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when built in 1972, the Sudbury superstack was the largest chimney in the world. Today, the mining company Vale has reduced emissions so much that it no longer needs the superstack. Last month, Vale announced that it was ending the use of the superstack in 2020. This is a story of progress, of doing things better, smarter, safer, and more efficiently.

However, Sudbury's real story of re-greening and regeneration, of rebirth, began because the superstack was built 45 years ago. Mining is in Sudbury's bloodstream, and the superstack was a mighty symbol of our industry.

[Translation]

Sudbury is an excellent example of the great strides that can be made in environmental protection and economic development.

[English]

Sudbury has gone from the pollution capital of Canada to one of the most innovative, green mining clusters in the world.

Is Sudbury a shining example? Yes, it is an example that a strong economy and healthy environment go hand in hand.

Forty-five years ago, bigger was better. Today, smarter is better.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN RUSSIA

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few months ago, Vladimir Kara-Murza came into my office to promote Canada's adoption of the Magnitsky Act. He walked with a cane. His face and body showed the effects of being poisoned. He was originally poisoned following his appearance before the U.S. Congress where he spoke of expanding human rights sanctions in Russia.

We talked about the risk he was taking by appearing before a House of Commons committee. He knew he was at risk.

I have seldom met a more intelligent and brave advocate for a just cause than Vladimir Kara-Murza. It is therefore very disturbing to learn that he is in hospital, in a coma, a victim of a second poisoning.

We know that the Putin regime will deny responsibility and promise a full investigation, just as the Putin regime denied full responsibility for Boris Nemtsov's murder and promised a full investigation, just as it did for Alexander Litvinenko, and just as it did for the former president of the Ukraine.

Vladimir is a brave man. Godspeed.

* * *

●(1410)

HOCKEY IN BRUCE—GREY—OWEN SOUND

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound has a long tradition of hockey excellence, and this year is no exception.

First, the OHL's Owen Sound Attack just set a franchise record 15-game win streak that spanned almost two straight months. This amazing streak has propelled the team to ninth place on the Canadian Hockey League rankings. While this streak recently came to an end, I am pleased to report to the House that the Attack are now on a new two-game win streak.

Furthermore, my hometown of Wiarton has put forward a bid to become Canada's next Kraft Hockeyville. In a few weeks, Kraft will announce the top 10 Hockeyville nominees. Citizens of Wiarton and area are working hard to win this honour and the \$100,000 grand prize that comes with it for major repairs and upgrades to the Wiarton and district community centre and arena. I encourage all Canadians and members of the House to learn more at facebook.com/wiartontkhv.

On behalf of the House, I would like to wish the town of Wiarton the best of luck in its pursuit to become Kraft Hockeyville.

* * *

*[Translation]***ERIK GUAY**

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to celebrate and congratulate the new super G world champion in alpine skiing.

Statements by Members

Erik Guay continues to make history. Yesterday, in Saint-Moritz, he became the first Canadian skier to win this title. Erik is originally from the Laurentians and was a classmate of mine. Once again, he put his ambition and leadership on display for all the world to see.

The heart of the Laurentians is known as the birthplace of skiing in Canada. This reputation was established when my grandmother, Pat Paré, became the first female alpine skiing champion in Canada and the first female ski instructor in Canada, at Tremblant, in 1940.

Erik Guay's tremendous success today only solidifies this reputation. Erik's victory message on Facebook speaks volumes about his character.

[*English*]

"I'd just like to take a moment to thank my behind the scenes team, coaches, therapists, trainers, ski technician, family, and friends. This is our victory!!!"

[*Translation*]

Erik Guay, our champion, our role model.

* * *

[*English*]

YOUTH IN TOBIQUE—MACTAQUAC

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the good work of an energetic, inspired, and motivated group in my riding. Their desire to make positive local change is impressive, and their optimism is infectious.

[*Translation*]

They volunteer their time to tackle tough issues around seniors, education, and employment out of a sense of altruism in order to make a change.

I want to thank Amy Baker, Caroline Burpee, Morgan Clowes, Matthew Cumming, Pascale Gagnon, Jenna Green, Vanessa Nichol, Louise Pickard, Latesha Porter, Hannah Saunders, Devon Schriver, and Destiny Spencer.

[*English*]

They are the founding members of the Tobique—Mactaquac Youth Constituency Council, and they are setting an example. They are our future leaders.

Investing in our youth, as our government has done, means investing in our future. I am connecting with the youth in my riding, and from where I am standing, our future is so bright that we are going to need shades.

* * *

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to a hard-working and dedicated individual who has served this chamber with distinction for more than 32 years and is preparing for a well-deserved retirement.

Lynn Legault has acted as a supervisor of the parliamentary page program for over three decades, where she has witnessed Canada's history in the making.

Over the years, she has facilitated the operations of the House of Commons and ensured that we, as MPs, are able to do our job and represent Canadians.

Lynn has always been an inspiration to those whom she has worked alongside and a role model and mentor to our pages.

Her constant smile, compassion, and positive outlook on life has had a significant effect on the lives of all those she has supervised throughout her exceptional career.

On behalf of all my colleagues and from me personally, I would like to thank Lynn for her dedication and loyalty in her over 32 years of continuous hard work. We wish Lynn all the best as she enters this new chapter of her life. I thank Lynn for her service to our country.

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MANITOBA SPORTS HALL OF FAME

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate a constituent on her induction to the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame.

From 2000 to 2004, Rhiannon Leier Blacher represented Canada at many international swimming competitions, including the 2000 Olympics in Sydney and the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

Throughout her competitive career, she won 13 national titles and 19 international medals and set four national senior records, specializing in 50-metre and 100-metre breaststroke and 4x50-metre medley relays. In 2004, she was named Canadian female swimmer of the year.

Since retiring from active competition, Ms. Leier Blacher has stayed active in her sport and is assistant head coach of the St. James Seals Swim Club in Winnipeg.

I wish to commend her for her commitment to sport and her community and for all she has done to represent Canada on the world stage. I ask all members to join me in congratulating her on this significant and well-deserved honour.

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JUSTICE FOR YOUTH

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just this week young people were told again by the government that they are to blame for their insecure job situation.

Canadians of all ages want good jobs, good jobs that are disappearing. Inequality is increasing, and this is directly linked to the rise of precarious work.

●(1415)

[*Translation*]

Canada's young people are being left out in the cold. That is the message that we have been hearing across the country.

[English]

However, this did not just happen. This has been the result of successive Liberal and Conservative governments that pushed the politics of privatization, outsourcing, and austerity, the result of trade agreements that have sold us out, of foreign takeovers, and of growing corporate concentration.

[Translation]

Today, young people are rallying together and insisting that the government do more.

[English]

They are fighting back through movements like Black Lives Matter, indigenous struggles, Climate Action Network Canada, and Fight for \$15 & Fairness. They are challenging a system that is holding us back.

Together we must join in solidarity and build a movement for social, environmental, and economic justice for youth and all Canadians.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT IN ALBERTA

Mr. Earl Dreshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night I joined my Conservative colleagues for an emergency debate regarding the Alberta jobs crisis.

We had hoped that the Liberals would address this issue, but instead they spent their time congratulating themselves for things that were never delivered.

Let me bring the focus back on Albertans. More than 200,000 Albertans have lost their jobs, and it is crippling the entire Alberta economy.

Hundreds of businesses in my riding have permanently closed their doors, and many families have lost their livelihoods, their homes, and their savings.

Albertans want their jobs back. They want to work, and the Liberals need to stop working against them.

For the past year our pleas have fallen on deaf ears, and from the way the Liberals acted last night, it looks as if nothing has changed. The Alberta jobs crisis is not an alternative fact; it is a harsh reality.

* * *

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR FUNDRAISER

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we are currently experiencing some of coldest temperatures of the year, it is important to think about those who do not have a place to stay and are spending the night out in the cold.

On February 25, I will once again be taking part in the annual Coldest Night of Year walk to raise money for the hungry, homeless, and hurting. Since its inception in 2011, Coldest Night of the Year has raised over \$12 million for its cause and has made a difference all across Canada.

Oral Questions

Coldest Night of the Year walks are taking place in communities all across the country, and I call on all members in this House to take part in the Coldest Night of the Year walk in their communities.

If members cannot participate themselves, they should please feel free to donate to my team, Gagan's Go-Getters, at canada.cnoy.org.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, a number of government ministers went to Washington. Next week, it will be the Prime Minister's turn to go.

Canadians want tangible results, not just tweets, photos, and words. They want jobs.

How does the Prime Minister plan to maintain trade ties with the Americans while protecting jobs here in Canada?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I think that our strategy is clear and effective.

As my colleague mentioned, I was in Washington this week, along with the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Finance. We explained how important Canada and our economy are to American workers. The Prime Minister will do likewise on Monday. That is our job and we do it with pride.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister has completely lost control of the government's spending. The deficit will be two or three times more than was promised, and he will need to raise taxes in order to balance his budget. Will the finance minister confirm today that he will not attack Canadian seniors by removing pension income splitting to balance his budget?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid my colleague has a short memory. The first thing that this government did was reduce taxes for nine million Canadians. It then came along with the Canada child benefit, which is helping nine out of 10 families, and then introduced an infrastructure program for \$128 billion, something that is historic in this country. The sad thing that the people at home recognize is that the Conservatives voted against helping the middle class in this country every step of the way.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only a Liberal would try to make people believe that a program that helps 90% of the population is better than the universal child care benefit, which helped 100% of the population.

The Minister of Finance has lost control of government spending, and our children and grandchildren will have to pay the price.

Oral Questions

Can he promise today that he will not cut any other benefits for families who need them?

• (1420)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean.

What I can promise him today is that, while we are in office, we will work for Canadian families and the middle class. That is what we did in budget 2016 and in the fall economic update. He can rest assured of that.

Every day, every step of the way, the members on this side of the House are working to improve the lives of Canadian workers.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's words are in question these days because of his long list of broken promises. He just cannot be trusted. Therefore, we were skeptical when the Prime Minister said that he would not tax the health and dental benefits of Canadians, so we put the question to the House. We asked him to say no to this regressive tax. In true form, the Liberals were completely inconsistent, and Canadians are now worried that this tax is on the table. Why do the Liberals keep breaking their word? How can Canadians know that they will not have to pay more for health and dental benefits?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for allowing me to repeat this. The first thing we did, and the promise that we made, was to reduce taxes for Canadians. What Canadians across this nation remember is that the Conservatives voted against that. They have voted against helping middle-class families. They have voted against helping Canadian workers. However, we will continue to do just that, working for middle-class Canadians.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can say what they want, but the record shows that on Tuesday they refused to vote against taxing the health and dental benefits of Canadians. That means that Canadians may be paying an extra \$1,000 for their health and dental benefits.

My question is this. The Liberals did not talk about this in their platform, and they voted against our motion on Tuesday. What other tax increases are they trying to keep secret, being wishy-washy about, and playing both sides of the ledger? Where else will they be taxing Canadians?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know who to trust when it comes to taxes, because the first thing we did was reduce taxes for middle-class Canadians, and Canadians know that across the nation.

The Prime Minister was very clear in answering the question from the member, and she knows that well. What we are doing is reviewing all the tax measures in this country. This is the right thing to do. That is what the responsible government is doing.

One thing Canadians will always remember is that the first thing this government did was to reduce taxes for the middle class.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, “Only countries that respect human rights and offer a high degree of protection to asylum seekers may be designated as safe third countries.”

Twenty-two refugees risked life and limb crossing from the U.S. into Canada. No one risks their family's safety unless they have no choice. These refugees are blocked from the Canadian system while they are the U.S. because of the safe third country agreement.

Does the minister still believe the U.S. is offering a high degree of protection to asylum seekers, yes or no?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been recognized as being a global leader in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers. We are proud of that tradition.

The safe third country agreement between the United States and Canada provides an orderly system of managing asylum claims. The hon. member knows or should know that the U.S. executive order has no bearing on the U.S. safe third country agreement with Canada.

We are proud of our tradition of offering protection. Every eligible asylum seeker has access to a fair hearing in front of the Immigration and Refugee Board. Each case is assessed based on its merits.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, 22 refugees crossed the border in the freezing cold to seek safety in Canada, but under the safe third country agreement, refugees who enter the United States cannot then come to Canada.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that we will always be welcoming to vulnerable people. These refugees are vulnerable people.

Will the government suspend the safe third country agreement so that it can welcome them?

• (1425)

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year alone, we will welcome 40,000 refugees in Canada. That includes 25,000 resettled refugees, which is double the number that the previous government welcomed. It also includes 16,000 privately sponsored refugees, which is triple the number the previous government had.

We will take no lessons from those parties on our record. We are proud of record, and we will continue to support Canadians in their extraordinary generosity to those who are seeking protection.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was not really what I asked, but whatever.

Oral Questions

We know that a Canadian family was stopped at the U.S. border. They are Canadian citizens who live in Brossard, and they happen to be Muslim.

When the Prime Minister was asked about this, he replied that he is working with the Americans to figure out how to make things better for Canadians. That is not good enough under the circumstances. It is not good enough when that kind of thing happens.

Can the minister tell us if this was an isolated incident or if other Canadian citizens have been turned away at the border?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, proper and appropriate treatment for all people from Canada seeking to enter the United States or any other country is a priority for this government.

Canadian citizenship and travel documents need to be respected. In this particular case, the office of the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert has been in touch with the Canadian citizen who made this complaint. When we get full details of the circumstances, I will both encourage her to apply for the redress process, but also—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Fadwa Alaoui is a Muslim Canadian born in Morocco. She has a Canadian passport, but that was not enough.

Border guards berated her about how often she attends her mosque, what her views are about President Trump, and if she knew anyone killed in the Quebec City mosque attack. She was humiliated and four hours later she drove home.

This kind of treatment goes directly against what the government has promised. What is the Liberal government doing about this situation? Can it confirm that there are no other Canadians who have faced this type of situation?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the microphone was cut off before the hon. member could hear the end of my previous answer. Number one, we encourage anyone facing this situation to appeal through the normal processes, but number two, draw the circumstances and the facts with complete details to my attention and I will take those cases up with the U.S. administration.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I asked the defence minister in December to fix the inequity of awarding danger pay and benefits to some but not all of our troops fighting ISIS, the minister said he would. It never crossed my mind the Liberals would do that by taking away everyone's danger pay. Canadian troops stationed in Kuwait are now having their paycheques reduced by over \$1,500 a month by the Liberals.

Why is the Prime Minister betraying our brave men and women who are in the fight against ISIS?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated to the member opposite during committee, we

are committed to looking after our men and women, including their compensation. Our government had concerns regarding the current situation that was not fully fair and equitable. That is why I have asked the chief of the defence staff to work with the relevant agencies to review the compensation rules and propose changes, including finding ways to prevent the negative impacts on our deployed personnel.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that does not fix this current situation. The defence minister is a proud veteran, and he knows better than anyone how important danger pay is not just for our brave men and women in uniform but for their families back at home as well.

We all knew the Liberals would cut defence spending, but we did not ever imagine they would literally do it on the backs of our soldiers and military families.

Will the defence minister quit taking his marching orders from the Prime Minister, fight for our troops, and reinstate all of the danger pay and benefits for all of our troops who are in the fight against ISIS?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, we will always be looking after our troops. It was during my first visit into Kuwait when I was appointed defence minister where I realized some of these inequities. That is why I have asked the chief of the defence staff to look at these things. It is the interdepartmental team that does it. Some rules were actually put into place in 2014, so these things do take time, but we will be working through it and making sure we work with the relevant agencies and all the recommendations we made so that we can move forward on this.

● (1430)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are cutting the monthly pay of soldiers deployed in Kuwait by more than \$1,500. For the minister to cut their pay once they have been deployed is despicable. Our soldiers expect the minister to protect them, but that is obviously not happening.

We brought this to the minister's attention in December, but nothing was done. Unfortunately, the minister ignored the issue. As a former unit commander, I am ashamed of my country and the way the Liberals are treating our soldiers.

Will the Liberals stop pinching pennies at the soldiers' expense? Mr. Minister, will you fix this problem yourself?

The Speaker: I would remind the member to direct his remarks to the Chair.

The Minister of National Defence.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what was despicable was actually sending our troops in the first place without all these compensations. When I first visited our troops, I discovered this. I have had conversations with members opposite on this. It is the reason why it was brought to my attention. We have to work through a process to be able to resolve some of these issues. Many different departments are involved, and we are working through it, and we will get through this.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was not until this story came out in the media yesterday that anyone heard about it. Since December, my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman and I have been calling on the Minister of National Defence to address this. We have talked about it very discreetly. Nothing happened. Now that the media are talking about it, finally we see a response. People are calling for a response, but now is not the time.

Can the minister resolve this case immediately, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, we are working through the rules that were put in place by the previous government in 2014. I have asked the chief of the defence staff to work with the relevant agencies to look at the various processes they have to go through, making sure that we have equitable compensation for our troops.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, millennials experienced Liberals' backtracking on electoral reform, and our veterans are suffering after Liberals promised them everything to get elected. Today, we hear another story of a veteran losing their home because they did not receive benefits owed to them after being medically released from the Canadian Forces.

The DND ombudsman offered a simple solution that the veterans affairs committee agreed to: make sure our soldiers have everything in place before they go home.

Enough with the platitudes. Enough with the talking points. When will the minister stop paying lip service to our veterans and do his job?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the well-being of veterans and their families is at the heart of all we do at Veterans Affairs. Delivering timely benefits is an area where we can and must do better. In 2015-16, we saw a 19% increase in the number of disability benefit claims. This is a good thing. It means more people are coming forward to get the help they need when they need it. In order to address this, we are streamlining the disability benefits process, hiring more staff, and simplifying the decision-making process. We know we are doing better for veterans, and we will continue to work hard to provide them with the services they need.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Dave Bona, a veteran, waited eight hours in the freezing cold for the Prime Minister's town hall in Saskatoon. Once inside, a student,

recognizing that he was a veteran by his uniform, in respect offered him his seat, but Dave was approached by a Liberal organizer and told he couldn't take it, that he had to go to the back. Clearly visible to the Prime Minister, Dave stood at attention for 20 minutes waiting to ask a question, but was ignored. Why did the Prime Minister ignore Dave Bona?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to veterans and their families, full stop. After the previous 10 years with the former government frankly ignoring veterans' concerns by the fact that it closed offices, that it reduced one-third of the front-line staff, it is shocking that we are actually getting this question.

Our government is working hard to ensure that veterans receive the care, compassion, and respect they deserve. Budget 2016 saw us put \$5.6 billion in more resources to veterans and their families. We are going to continue to deliver on their behalf.

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*[Translation]***CANADA POST**

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Liberals and the Prime Minister himself promised to restore home mail delivery for those who had lost it.

The minister has had Canada Post's review report since December, but we still have not heard anything about his decision.

Much like the promise for electoral reform, can we expect this report to be torn up as well? Is this just another broken promise?

● (1435)

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, contrary to my colleague's comments, we are following through on a promise we made during the election to stop installing community mailboxes—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We need to hear the answer.

The hon. Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

Oral Questions

Hon. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing with the promise we made, and that was to stop the installation of roadside mailboxes and to consult with Canadians from coast to coast to coast to get their views on the type of Canada Post we need to have, one that is sustainable and delivers for Canadians. We are doing just that. We now have the two reports needed that we now—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the Liberals have actually lost the ability to tell when they are breaking promises. It is worrisome.

Today in the House of Commons we are debating an NDP motion to simply acknowledge what everybody already knows: that when it came to electoral reform, the Liberal promise to fix our outdated and unfair voting system was broken and that the Liberals should apologize. Some Liberals have actually already started apologizing to their constituents, so this should be easy, but during the debate today, a Liberal MP from Toronto said he was actually proud of the Liberals' decision to betray their promise to Canadians.

I have a question for the minister. Yes or no, is the minister proud of her Prime Minister's decision to betray his promise to Canadians?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I explained to my hon. colleague during the debate this morning, we listened to Canadians, and listening means listening to all points of view. I know that is something the member has trouble understanding, but that is what we did—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Karina Gould: —and I am looking forward to working on democratic institutions to strengthen, protect, and improve our system.

The Speaker: I want to remind the hon. minister that members here are very good at understanding things, and it does not help the decorum in the House but helps to create disorder to suggest otherwise. I would urge members not to do things like that.

The hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Bombardier, the Liberals need to understand that these are taxpayer dollars that they are spending, not their own. If they are going to give big handouts to one favoured company, they need to have a plan to get the money back.

Can the Liberals explain what the repayment plan is for Bombardier, and how they are going to make sure that the hard-earned money of Canadian taxpayers will be returned?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I find it a bit ironic that the member opposite was at the cabinet table when the Conservatives cut a cheque for \$350 million for Bombardier in 2008, but let me talk about now and the commitment that we have made.

We have made a commitment to the workers. We have made a commitment to their families. We are investing in the aerospace sector, because this is an important sector that generates 211,000 jobs, that contributes \$28 billion to our economy. We are proud of our record. We are proud of the fact that we are making investments, growing the economy, and creating good-quality jobs for the middle class.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the previous government helped out Bombardier in 2008, it was in the initial stages of the C Series development, when it was doing research and development. Since then, Bombardier has secured many large orders and its balance sheet is much, much stronger.

There are many smaller businesses in the aerospace sector, companies that have truly innovative products that could really have used that money to help get those products to market. How is the government going to explain to them that one company, which said it does not even need the money, is more deserving than they are?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, this investment is going to help communities. It is going to help workers. There are 800 suppliers associated with Bombardier that will benefit from this investment, because they are part of the aerospace cluster. They are part of the ecosystem when it comes to that very important cluster and sector.

That is what we are doing. We are investing not only in that large company, but we are investing in all of the supplier base from coast to coast to coast. This will help small businesses. More importantly, this will help Canadians and will strengthen the middle class by making sure that we focus on good-quality jobs.

* * *

● (1440)

TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what we know about the effect of carbon taxes on the gap between rich and poor. One, we know that those with the least will suffer the most, because the poor spend a third more of family income on the items that get taxed. Two, prior experience shows that money generated from the tax always goes to those wealthy enough to lobby for it, like the super rich who will now get a taxpayer rebate to buy \$150,000 Tesla cars. Three, we know the government is censoring a Finance Canada memo showing the impact of the carbon tax on the gap between rich and poor.

Will the government release that memo today?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we do know about carbon pricing is that it is the most efficient way to reduce emissions and to innovate and create good jobs. It always surprises me that the member opposite, who professes to believe in free market principles, just cannot understand why carbon pricing makes sense.

Oral Questions

I already talked about Patrick Brown, the leader of the Ontario Conservatives, but maybe I will talk about Preston Manning. Conservatives profess to believe in markets, so why do Conservatives not major on how to harness markets to the environmental conversation and make that their signature contribution?

I encourage the member opposite to work with me to reduce emissions, focusing on the economy.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister and others claim these taxes are revenue neutral. They claim that, for example, a single woman with an income of \$45,000 will get back, in rebates and other tax relief, all of the taxes she pays on heat, gas, and groceries, but the only way to test that is to know what carbon tax amounts she will pay in the first place. Data contained in a blacked-out Finance Canada memo will tell us exactly that.

If these new taxes are really revenue neutral for the poor, why will the government not prove it and release the data now?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought I would also point out that there are other Conservatives across the country who believe in pricing pollution. Manitoba's Conservative government, in its speech from the throne, said that its climate action plan will include carbon pricing that fosters emission reductions, retains investment capital, and stimulates new innovation in clean energy businesses and jobs.

Once again, I encourage members opposite to work with our government so that we can grow a clean economy and ensure a better future for our kids.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' Bill C-27 is an attack on stable, secure workplace pensions that would let employers back away from commitments to workers and pensioners. This week, workers came to Ottawa to raise their voices about this dangerous bill. Now, according to reports, the Liberal government has said it will put a hold on Bill C-27 because of widespread opposition.

Will the government commit to withdraw this anti-worker bill and refrain from any further attempts to attack workers' pensions?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, helping Canadians achieve a safe and dignified retirement is key to our plan to help the middle class and those working hard to join it. Bill C-27 aims to broaden the scope of retirement saving opportunities available to Canadians. Under our legislation, individuals have a choice. Those who do not consent, they maintain their benefits. We are willing to take the necessary time to give all parties the opportunity to share suggestions within the process.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we have learned that a veteran has been evicted from her home because of delays in receiving her pension. This is

unconscionable. Compound that by the fact this veteran had six tours of duty, two bouts of cancer, and is a single mom. It should make the minister and the Prime Minister hang their heads in shame.

Enough is enough. Will the minister take action today to ensure that veterans have their pensions in place the day that they are released from service?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is why the Minister of National Defence and I are working very hard on closing the seam to ensure we professionalize the release process and ensure that when our men and women in uniform are leaving the service they get the help they need where and when they need it.

I can also say that we are working hard to deliver timely benefit decisions and it is an area where we can do better. In 2015-16, we did see a 19% increase in the number of disability claims. We are working through those, putting processes in place to speed up delivery of our services. We can and will do better on behalf of veterans.

* * *

● (1445)

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bell Helicopter Textron is a major employer in my riding and the Lower Laurentians region. Many of my constituents work for that company or are associated with Bell Helicopter suppliers.

I was especially happy to learn that last year Bell Helicopter renewed its commitment to remain in and continue contributing to Quebec and Canada.

Can the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development provide the House with an update on this important subject?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for her question.

I was very proud to be in Mirabel this morning to see Bell Helicopter Textron's new assembly line. This is another example of our government working closely with provincial governments to create a positive business environment for companies in Canada. This co-operation with the Government of Quebec has helped keep 900 jobs and create over 100 new jobs in the province.

Our government committed to growing our economy and the middle class.

*Oral Questions**[English]***HOUSING**

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, homeowners refinance their homes for many reasons, to invest in a small business, for a home renovation project, to get through an extended strike or lock-out, or even a divorce, but at the finance committee we learned that the Liberals have cancelled CMHC insurance for those who want to refinance their homes. These changes have resulted in Canadians paying higher interest rates when refinancing their mortgage. These changes were imposed with zero consultation.

Why are the Liberals hurting struggling Canadian homeowners by hiking their interest rates?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for many families, their homes are the most important investment that they will make in their lives. That is why we have taken action to contain risks in the housing market and support long-term affordability. For example, the government has implemented a mortgage rate stress test to ensure that Canadians are taking on mortgages that they can afford even if the rates go up. The government also announced income tax measures to improve the fairness and integrity of the tax system. We will continue to monitor the market to protect middle-class Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure we were at the same parliamentary committee because the experts told us during the last three consultations that this had absolutely no impact on Toronto and Vancouver, even though it ought to have affected them. However, it did have an adverse effect on first-time homebuyers from coast to coast.

Yesterday, members of the Fédération des chambres immobilières du Québec were here and they told us that there were 6,000 fewer first-time homebuyers in Canada. We are talking about families, the middle class. That is \$220 million less in the Canadian economy.

Why does the government continue to attack families and the middle class in Quebec and across Canada with its bad real estate measures?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for many families, their homes are the most important investment that they will make in their lives. That is why we have taken action to contain risks in the housing market and support long-term affordability.

For example, the government has implemented a mortgage rate stress test to ensure that Canadians are taking on mortgages that they can afford even if the rates go up. The government also announced income tax measures to improve the fairness and integrity of the tax system.

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*[English]***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the parliamentary budget officer identified a

shortfall of \$9 billion for infrastructure. We know that 96% of the announced projects are not under construction. We know Alberta was promised \$700 million in fast-track infrastructure funds over a year ago, and no surprise, Alberta is still waiting for over 90% of those funds.

When will the Liberals start taking the job crisis in Alberta seriously and fast-track the promised infrastructure funds?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2012, the previous government approved four projects for Alberta, two projects in 2013 for Alberta and five projects in 2014 for Alberta. Compare that to 127 projects approved by our government for Alberta.

When it comes to building infrastructure, growing the economy, creating jobs for Albertans, we take no lessons from the old, tired Conservative Party.

● (1450)

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities likes to boast about his project spending, but on this side of the House we know the devil is in the details. The fact is that things are just not being built.

According to the Government of Canada's own website, which is updated weekly, only one of 127 projects announced in Alberta by the Liberals has started construction. Nothing has started in Edmonton.

Another Liberal promise made; another Liberal promise broken. Why have these projects not started?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 127 projects I talked about leveraged \$4.2 billion investment in partnership with the provinces and municipalities.

As far as Edmonton is concerned, we approved 47 projects under the new plan introduced in budget 2016. Those projects are helping us build better transit systems, reducing commuter time for Edmontonians, as well as creating Canadian jobs in local communities.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the C.D. Howe Institute's recent study, the federal government could pocket up to \$16 billion if it decides to sell our airports to private investors. The Calgary, Ottawa, and Vancouver airports and Air Canada are condemning this privatization plan because passengers and workers would be the first to pay the price.

Canadians have already paid for this infrastructure. Therefore, if the government really has their interests at heart, is it not time for it to reject this privatization plan rather than financing the government's friends?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to airports, our first priority is service to passengers, whether it is in terms of cost, options, competitiveness, wait times at security or customs, or passengers' rights. We are exploring different options and everyone can rest assured that our first priority is and will always be service to passengers.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is looking at options, so it has not ruled out privatization, which is rather shameful. Airports are not the only infrastructure that the government is looking at privatizing. The Liberals promised to invest in infrastructure. We have been talking a lot about promises lately. As it turns out, the parliamentary budget officer, not the opposition parties, found that most of the infrastructure funding is not actually flowing.

Instead of keeping its promises, the government would rather set up an infrastructure privatization bank. Can the minister reassure Canadians and tell them that it is not planning to sell off our public infrastructure?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, out of the \$180 billion that we will invest over 12 years in infrastructure, only 8% will be delivered through the infrastructure bank. The rest of the money is available to municipalities, the provinces, and the territories through the traditional means of national programs as well as bilateral agreements that we will sign with each province and territory.

I can assure the member that every community will be served in an equitable way to grow the economy and create jobs for the middle class and those who are working so hard to be a part of it.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Liberals push to legalize marijuana by 2018, many Canadians are concerned about the consequences of people driving while high. There are screening devices that detect the presence of drugs in the body, but they are not authorized for use under the Criminal Code.

Will the Liberals authorize the use of these devices before they introduce legislation, finally making the health and safety of Canadians a priority?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. gentleman may know, over the course of the last several weeks, the RCMP and other police forces across the country, in co-operation with the Government of Canada, have been testing a number of scientific devices for roadside testing of drug-impaired driving to determine their efficacy under Canadian weather conditions, including in the middle of the winter.

We will ensure that we have both the legal regime and the scientific regime to deal with drug-impaired driving.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

submitted a report that confirms how important and urgent it is for the government to give police forces the tools they need to deal with drug-impaired driving before it even begins to think about legalizing marijuana.

For my part, I took action by introducing Senator Claude Carignan's bill, which would allow police officers to detect drug-impaired drivers and thus save many lives.

Do the Liberals plan to make Canadians' safety a priority and support this bill before legalizing marijuana?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government made it clear a number of months ago that we intended to have a new legal regime in place and that we would introduce legislation to that effect in the spring of this year. The work is proceeding along in that direction very well. We have the expert advice of the task force, headed by the Hon. Anne McLellan, and we will also weigh very carefully the good advice from the chiefs of police.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals ran on a promise to build consultation and social licence into their decision-making process when it had significant impact on local communities. However, it would appear that they are ignoring their own advice or promise in this regard in terms of drug injection sites.

Just today in committee, the Liberal members voted down my amendment to Bill C-37, which asked the minister to give 45 days public notice before rendering a decision.

Why are the Liberals afraid to give communities a voice in whether a drug injection site is in fact authorized for their community?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting the health and safety of all Canadians. The evidence is absolutely clear. In communities where they are needed and appropriate, harm reduction is an important part of a comprehensive approach to drug control. We put harm reduction back in as a pillar of our drugs and substances strategy. This is why we are proposing to streamline the criteria and process for supporting community applications in Bill C-37.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie went on a second official visit to Haiti to view the impact of Hurricane Matthew and Canadian aid and to attend the inauguration of the 58th president of the Republic of Haiti, His Excellency Jovenel Moïse.

Canadian aid is important to Haiti. Could the minister update us on the matter?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Bourassa for his question.

I just got back from Haiti, where I attended the president's inauguration. I also toured two Canadian-sponsored projects, the hospital in Gonaïves and the national police academy. Yesterday, I announced an investment of \$92.2 million over five years for five development projects focusing on the health of women and girls, child protection, and access to justice.

Our government is committed to supporting the new Haitian government, and I had an opportunity to talk about this with the new president himself.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Liberals introduced a bill that would give a break to human traffickers who committed multiple crimes. This is unbelievable. The bill says that people convicted of human trafficking would not have to serve consecutive sentences when they committed additional unspeakable crimes against victims.

Why are the Liberals always so worried about giving a break to criminals? Why do they not start sticking up for victims for a change?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to combatting human trafficking and better protecting victims who are among society's most vulnerable.

Bill C-38 would bring into force the former private member's bill, Bill C-452, and also make it in compliance with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The bill would give law enforcement and prosecutors additional tools in terms of investigations and prosecutions to assist in combatting this challenge.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the translation bureau does extremely valuable work to promote our two official languages, but over 400 positions have been eliminated over the past four years and there are plans to cut 140 more. Morale is at an all-time low, and bureau staff are under constant pressure.

Today the Minister of Public Services and Procurement announced 19 new hires, but that is nowhere near what is needed. Will the minister commit to putting an end to the cuts and to replacing every staff member who leaves the translation bureau?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to having a translation bureau that is productive and that produces quality. We are committed to making sure we have the employees we need to carry out the work expected of them.

We are also committed as a party to official bilingualism. We are taking extraordinary measures to make sure that happens with this government, including putting in a different chief executive officer, a quality officer, and we are going to hire more employees.

We are going to do what should have been done years ago. We are going to fix the wrongs of the past with respect to official bilingualism.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month I had the chance to announce the start of construction of a new inter-regional transit terminal in the city of Vaughan.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities has been advocating strongly for infrastructure investments that will grow the middle class and make a real difference day to day for families. The families in my riding appreciate investments in public transit.

Could the minister inform the House what he has been doing to ensure communities like Vaughan—Woodbridge benefit from much-needed investments in public transit?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge for his hard work on behalf of his constituents.

In December, we announced \$46 million to support a new transit and carpool lot that would reduce congestion and get commuters home faster to spend time with their families. The York region will also receive additional funding under the long-term infrastructure plan, and the details will be announced very soon.

Our government is proud to support investments in the York region and across the country.

*Points of Order***GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the last election the Prime Minister promised only modest deficits, but, alas, that promise was broken. Since then, Liberal ministers have been looking for ways to raise taxes on hard-working Canadians to pay for the Prime Minister's billions of dollars in broken promises.

We now learn that the President of the Treasury Board is planning to raise user fees, which is just a tax by another name.

Will the President of the Treasury Board tell Canadians which fees are going up, by how much, and when?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, businesses, consumers, and all Canadians benefit from government services. We want to strengthen the transparency and oversight of user fees that pay for some of these services. Everyone, including big businesses, should pay their fair share so middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join the middle class do not get stuck with the bill.

We are going to treat all Canadians fairly. That is what our government does.

* * *

[Translation]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, reaction in Quebec to the so-called assistance the government is providing to Bombardier has been unanimous: cheap. Everyone agrees that it is too little, too late, and that it is disappointing.

Apart from the government itself and the Conservative Party, no one in Quebec believes that 38 times less than what was given to the auto industry is sufficient to support the flagship of Quebec's aerospace industry.

How can the Minister of Transport, a Quebec MP, justify waiting until Bombardier was gasping for its last breath before finally granting some support, which everyone in Quebec sees as vastly insufficient?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a strong team of about 40 MPs from across the province who are working hard for Quebec.

[English]

This incredible team made sure that we put forward a proposition that will help Canadian families, that will create good-quality jobs, that will benefit our communities, and that will strengthen the aerospace sector. This investment is about the future economy of Canada. It is about growth and jobs. This will benefit Quebec. Two-thirds of the jobs will be in Quebec.

This is exactly what we want to do. We want to create jobs, and we want to create growth.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when ageing sectors such as the auto

and oil sectors need help, Ottawa has its chequebook at the ready, but when it is time to help the economic development of Quebec's cutting-edge industries, Ottawa becomes a cheapskate. The government would rather see our plants suffer than to give us our fair share.

How can the government justify offering Bombardier help that is 38 times less than what it offered the auto industry? Was the government afraid of how English Canada might react?

● (1505)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the aerospace sector is one of the most innovative and export-driven sectors in Canada. It accounts for more than 211,000 high-quality jobs in Canada.

This announcement will ensure that 4,000 jobs are maintained and will create roughly 1,300 jobs. In Canada, Bombardier is the largest private-sector investor in research and development. Our government is committed to growing our economy and the middle class.

[English]

The Speaker: I realize that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is rising on a point of order. I know that the Minister of Democratic Institutions also has a point of order. I am going to ask them both to wait a moment while we have the Thursday question, if they do not mind.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the government House leader tell us about the business of the House for the rest of this week and next week?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will be continuing today to debate the NDP opposition day motion.

Tomorrow we will call Bill C-31, the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement, for debate at third reading.

Monday, we will resume third reading debate on Bill C-30, the CETA legislation.

[Translation]

In the coming days we will give priority to Bill C-37 on safe injection sites.

Next Thursday, February 16, shall be an allotted day.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER**ORAL QUESTIONS**

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising out of question period. I have the O'Brien and Bosc citations, which I know you are familiar with and which I will not cite here today.

Business of Supply

In a previous incarnation, we saw the Minister of Democratic Institutions make disparaging remarks about the electoral reform committee, which she later, and later I believe the Prime Minister, apologized for.

Today in question period, in response to a question I raised with respect to our motion today about the Liberal promise on electoral reform and the need to apologize, the minister, in response, made disparaging comments about my ability to perform my job as a member of Parliament and to listen to Canadians on the issue at hand.

I do not think this does anything for decorum in this place, nor does it raise the level of debate with regard to our democracy and the ways we can collectively improve it.

I would ask the minister now to respectfully withdraw those remarks.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand the importance of collegiality and respect for all members of this House, and for that reason, I am happy to withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: Order. I thank the member for raising the issue and the minister for her response.

The hon. member for Carleton is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the minister is not the only one who will apologize today. There has been a grievous procedural error, of which I am the author. The other day I raised a point of order in the House of Commons with respect to redacted documents, documents that would show the impact of an increased carbon tax on the most vulnerable people. I failed to table those redacted documents, and as a remedy, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table them now.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1510)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—COMMITMENTS REGARDING ELECTORAL REFORM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is such a great honour to stand in the House representing the people of Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I must say, I had really, honestly believed that one of my responsibilities as a member of Parliament was going to be to bring in a new electoral system. New Democrats, Liberals, and Greens all campaigned on a commitment to change the voting system, and I truly believed, how naive of me, that this was something this Parliament was going to do.

I feel very sad to be having to participate in the debate today on the Prime Minister misleading Canadians when he promised to change the current voting system to make every vote count.

We have heard the history today. The Prime Minister promised it repeatedly during the election campaign. He even appropriated the Fair Vote slogan “Make Every Vote Count”. He repeated the commitment in the throne speech that he would take action to ensure that 2015 would be the last federal election conducted under the first past the post voting system.

I want to read to the House just a fraction of the mail I am getting, which illustrates the depth of this disappointment.

Kimberly Krieger is a constituent from Nanaimo. She writes:

I am a constituent of yours from Nanaimo. I write to express my sense of disappointment. Actually, “disappointment” does not begin to describe how I felt this morning after hearing that the Liberal party has reneged on its promise of electoral reform. “Betrayal” comes somewhat closer.

...the government... is quite simply shirking their responsibility to make the changes they promised, while trying to use Canadians as a scapegoat not to make difficult policy decisions. It is shameful.

Our world is in turmoil because of a man who was not elected by the majority of voters in his nation. Canada deserves better than a system that would allow that.

This was such a strong theme in our election campaign. On Vancouver Island, there was not a single all-candidates meeting that did not talk about changing the voting system.

I knew personally what an opportunity this was. When I was elected to the Islands Trust Council, which is a regional government in my region, I was fortunate to be able to travel to Norway with a delegation of oil companies, government departments, provincial reps, and local and indigenous leaders. Thirty of us Canadians went to Norway to learn how it is managing its oil spill risk. However, the lessons I learned there about democracy were stronger than anything.

This is a country that elects more women than Canada does. It elects more minorities. It has an indigenous parliament embedded within its parliamentary system. There were very diplomatic embassy people travelling with us who let us know that decorum in the Norwegian parliament is something to aspire to. They said that they had seen our legislatures and parliaments in Canada and that theirs is nothing like that. It is a country that governs co-operatively.

Norway enacts policies for the common good. It does not have deep swings in ideology from one election to the next, because the parties are elected together and co-operate together. There are shifts, of course, in those coalitions over time.

No one would describe Norway as an unstable democracy. It elects more women. It has higher voter turnout. It has more diversity. Its parliament represents the diversity of the country, and they are elected in a proportional representation system.

Business of Supply

I would have thought that this government, especially having received feedback from across the country, would continue to believe in innovation. It would continue to want to elevate people of colour, minorities, and women to positions of decision-making. I would have thought it would want to get higher voter turnout and more youth engagement. No.

Instead of reforming our outdated and unfair voting system to ensure that all Canadians are truly represented in Parliament, the Liberals decided instead to keep the current system, because it benefits them. There is no other explanation.

Especially disturbing to me has been the government's claim, in the week since it broke its promise, that there is no consensus on electoral reform.

● (1515)

First, during the election two-thirds of Canadians voted for a party that promised to implement a form of proportional representation to make every vote count. Second, during the work of the committee, 90% of the experts and 80% of the members of the public who testified called on the government to adopt a proportional electoral system. Third, when the Liberals undermined the whole process by launching their ridiculous MyDemocracy.ca survey, they did not even ask Canadians what kind of voting system they wanted.

In my own riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, I have received several thousand letters and emails on this matter. We convened a town hall session in the summertime, not an easy time to get people out to meetings and not constructive of the government to leave it until summertime to initiate town halls. However, I am very thankful that almost 200 people came out to Vancouver Island University to a forum that was extremely well attended and very thoughtful. Eighty-four per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a party's seats in Parliament should reflect the percentage of the votes that it wins. A super-majority of the constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith who participated in that town hall and in our own survey in our mailing to every household said they prefer proportional representation and want to see the system changed quickly but properly. They demonstrated strong support for taking action to change our voting system.

Here is a quote that illustrates the kind of feedback that we got. This is from Barbara in Nanaimo, "I am 78 years old. I voted in every election since I was eligible. I'd like to feel like I am represented at least once before I die."

New Democrats co-operated in this process. We tried again and again to help the government keep its promise to change the voting system and make every vote count, by proposing a proportional electoral committee; working with the government; and trying to find ways to bring this forward speedily, even after the government let the issue languish for eight months. This has been well documented in the debate today and in the record in the House.

Genuinely, we wanted this to win. We were happy for the government to get the credit. We genuinely wanted to change the voting system to make every vote count because we know that this has worked again and again around the world. Of countries that score higher than Canada so far as gender equality in its parliament, every single one of them uses a form of proportional representation

in order to get people elected. We have extremely stable governments. All of the Scandinavian countries, Germany, New Zealand, and multiple examples of countries have had multiple decades of experience with proportional representation, and none of them would be described as fractious with strong right-wing, radical elements. None of them would be described as unstable.

What is the cost of this broken promise? I am hearing from a lot of young people who engaged in the election in good faith that they are feeling extremely cynical and saddened about the electoral process. I am very concerned that anybody else who might want to participate in a government consultation might say, "Why bother?"

I am encouraged by the numbers on the online petition. I checked right before my speech started. I bet that during the course of this speech it has clicked into the 95,000 count, an astonishing response from Canadians asking that the government keep its promise and change the voting system to make every vote count.

On Sunday, I was honoured to stand on the steps of Parliament with many young Canadians in a day of action to call for democratic reform, and I will be out again on Saturday in front of Parliament at two o'clock for a national day of action. This is happening across the country. People are calling out strongly for the government to keep its word, and for the benefit of all Canadians, for democracy, for minorities, for women, for young Canadians I implore the government to reconsider its betrayal of its election promise, its great betrayal of Canadians, and to please make every vote count.

● (1520)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take strong exception to this resolution that is being debated today, that "the government misled Canadians on its platform and Throne Speech commitment".

That is absolutely not my experience. The intention of the Prime Minister was genuine. I was part of a small group of members of Parliament who were invited to sit with the Prime Minister in his own home, as the Liberal leader, to discuss this matter in a way that was real, genuine, and with interest all around the table.

The Prime Minister is exceedingly committed to a co-operative Parliament. We have seen the benefits of that. We have seen the benefits of the change in tone. We have seen the empowerment of parliamentarians at committees. We have seen Senate reform that is completely changing the partisan divisive nature of the Senate.

I would like to ask the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith what evidence she has that there was intention to mislead Canadians on this platform commitment. Secondly, if the member who campaigned on balancing the budget, given the fact that there was—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I have the floor, Mr. Speaker.

I would urge the member to follow the lead of her fellow member of Parliament from Kelowna—Lake Country who says, partly because he negotiated with a member of the Green Party that the Green Party not be on the ballot, that he won because of his electoral reform promise. He has apologized to his constituents and voters for the government breaking its promise.

Business of Supply

I cannot pretend to look inside the Prime Minister's mind. The member is quite right. I had never met him or been invited to his dinner table. However, from anybody on the outside, a solemn promise right up until December was still being repeated, hand on heart, by the Prime Minister, saying that this will be the last election under first past the post. He did not say he would consult and consider and weigh it. People came out to vote for his party on the basis of that solemn promise.

I could have read 20 more heartfelt letters that say exactly that. The problem here today is the election platform on which the Prime Minister and the government was elected. It has been dishonoured and thrown away in what I would say is an extremely cynical way. I think the government is wrong. I think it has broken faith with voters. I think it would do very well to reconsider its ill-advised decision.

• (1525)

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words from my friend opposite.

I have two quick questions for her. The first is on her comment about a change to proportional will increase voter turnout. I am curious to know if she has any examples on specific countries. I know that in New Zealand, when they changed their voting system, according to the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, it was true, voter turnout in the first election after they changed the system to proportional was high, but in subsequent elections after that it slowly phased out and went back to kind of the normal rate.

My second question is on her comment about getting more women involved in politics. I think that is a good thing. My question to her is, instead of overhauling the complete system, would it not be easier or even a better idea if political parties got more engaged in getting more women involved in politics?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I am proud the New Democratic Party has policies in place that say a nomination contest cannot be held until efforts are exhausted, as a riding association, to recruit women onto the nomination ballot and also to recruit equity candidates.

In the past election, of our election slate, New Democrats ran 43% women. We elected women as 40% of our caucus. Liberals recruited 30% women as candidates and roughly got 30% female MPs. For Conservatives, who do not have a proactive plan, it is sort of 16%.

That is something political parties can do within a broken electoral system. Proportional representation across the board, of the stats that we have seen at committee and that Fair Votes provided, elect more women, more diversity, and more minorities, with a higher voter turnout.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Hull—Aylmer.

I strongly believe that every Liberal MP came to the House in 2015 believing that that year's election results really would be the last time first past the post would be used in a general election. We believed, naively perhaps, that we could have an honest conversation across the country about an incremental change that everyone would accept, knowing that the system we have has significant failings.

[*Translation*]

In a spirit of compromise and to see what the electoral reform would look like, we agreed to strike a committee along proportional rather than representative lines, giving the majority to the combined opposition, a committee mandated to talk to the country's population and propose a real path forward. The solution that the committee finally arrived at consisted in bartering a referendum that would be contrary to proportional representation.

I am first and foremost a rural member of Parliament. I grew up in a rural community and I live in a rural community. My family largely lives off the bounty of the land. Anyone looking for my house on Google Maps—which cannot really be done from my house because we don't have much in terms of Internet connection—has to zoom far out to find any roads. It goes without saying that, over my lifetime, not a lot of politicians have come knocking at my door, although we are only two hours from here.

My riding is large, but not the largest. There are 45 ridings larger than mine, and even under the most elementary proportional models, my riding would have to be partially or totally merged with the neighbouring ridings. There are many communities of 400 or even only 40 people in my riding, and they are already having trouble getting adequate representation. I visit all of them as often as I can. It is a lot of work, representing over 60,000 kilometres a year in travel for my wife and me, not to mention for my staff in the riding.

To merge my riding with an adjacent riding, will we be merging with the one that is a suburb of Montréal, will we be going north to Rouyn-Noranda, or maybe east to Trois-Rivières or west to Gatineau? If the bordering ridings are merged and I am asked to share representation with four MPs, where do you think the MPs are going to go? To the towns with populations of 400 or 40, or to the big urban centres?

Proportional representation is inevitably bad for rural Canada, whether we are talking about merged ridings, lists or additional seats. One sometimes sees a drawing of three persons of different heights trying to look over a fence, and there are three boxes. That which is equal is not equitable. Let us ask ourselves: do we want equal representation or equitable representation?

Business of Supply

•(1530)

[English]

Everywhere in the world electoral reform is a fight between those who tend to win and those who tend not to. It is not a left-versus-right issue, it is not a progressive issue. In this country, progressives would be more likely to be upset. In another country having a similar debate, it may be the conservatives. In proportional countries, the parties that perform poorly want single member plurality; in single member plurality countries, the parties that perform poorly want proportional. The demand for reform the world over has less to do with democratic principles than it does pursuing an advantage on the path to power.

Princeton political scientist Carles Boix has shown that, historically, political parties, whether of the left or the right, almost always support the electoral system that most benefits them. That the NDP has governed six provinces and a territory under single member plurality and never once brought forward electoral reform is proof positive of this paradox.

We hear sometimes that first past the post resulted in the current situation south of the border and, therefore, we must switch to proportional. We can look at France, that has had two-round elections since the 1950s, except for a single election in 1986, where the socialists thought they would benefit from a proportional system. Those who benefited most were the Holocaust-denying Front National, that went from zero seats to 35 and gained the credibility it needed to become a real contender for power.

The point is that every system can be manipulated. Mixed member proportional is a very rare system, and for good reason. Albania, Italy, Venezuela, Lesotho, and Romania have all experimented with it and then abandoned it because it is the easiest system of all electoral systems to manipulate.

By using two votes, one for the candidate and one for the party, particularly manipulative parties split into two registered parties. Sub-party A focuses its efforts on the candidate ballot and sub-party B focuses its efforts on the list ballot. The two parties, respectively, win, say, 40% of the constituency seats, with 30% of the popular vote, and because the list party in the partnership did not win any constituency seats, it is granted 30% of the seats through the top-up system. The two together now have around 60% of the seats, with only 30% of the vote. Of all of the systems available, mixed member proportional takes all that is bad about the two leading electoral systems and combines them.

We are often directed to other countries for examples, so let us take a quick look at a few more of them. Australia is the only country to use both mandatory voting and a preferential ballot, but nobody can tell me with a straight face that this has resulted in a permanent, stable, centrist government. It has a government that alternates between a left-wing party and a right-wing coalition, with no centrist party ever doing well. Finland and Israel use very similar pure proportional systems and these produce very different outcomes. The political culture is more important than the electoral system.

Belgium is credited with creating proportional and is principally known in this respect for its inability to get anything done, setting a world record of 589 days without a government just a few years ago

as the parties could not reach a compromise to even form a government.

Ireland uses multi-member STV similar to what was proposed in B.C., but its reality is vastly different from Canada's. The whole country is only three times the size of my riding.

If our problem is that our local representatives are too often elected on the basis of a strategic or split vote, then let us tackle that problem. If voting for a candidate who has our tepid support in order to prevent a candidate we cannot accept at the expense of the candidate who best reflects our actual views is the normal situation in Canada today, then let us solve that issue.

A preferential vote would do that. It would give us the option to vote for who we legitimately want, without benefiting the candidate we cannot accept to see as our representative. It would empower voters to empower their MPs, because they would have a genuine representative. Giving voters the right to specify second, third and fourth choices takes away the horse race narrative and makes the conversation about who will actually represent us as electors.

[Translation]

It is also most ironic that a movement to change the electoral system should arise from a belief that votes cast for everyone but the winner do not really count. As soon as a threshold is established beneath which no seat is awarded, the same fallacious argument suggests that those votes are wasted. Consider how hypocritical that is. Why should his vote count but not mine?

At the national level, according to MyDemocracy.ca, two thirds of Canadians are satisfied with our democracy, and of all the priorities presented, increasing the presence of small parties in Parliament garnered the least votes by far.

Out of the 70,000 or so surveys sent to all the households in my riding, we received about 100 responses to the question on electoral reform: 46.5% of respondents preferred the current system or a preferential system, 37.9% of them wanted a partially or totally proportional system, and 43% of respondents would like voting to be made compulsory.

Clearly, there is no more of a consensus in my riding than there is anywhere else, and the low response rate is a clear indication that this is simply not a priority for the people in my constituency. They are faced with far more important issues, and they are certainly making me aware of that fact.

In their daily lives, Internet access, lake management and related environmental concerns, and the infrastructure investment rate are much more important to them than checking a box on their ballot.

Business of Supply

[English]

I personally believe that voting should be nominally mandatory; that is, a symbolic enforcement mechanism such as a \$20 tax credit for voting or tax penalty for not doing so. Our campaign strategies now, across party lines, are to identify our voters and ensure they go out and vote. Low turnout advantages one candidate and high turnout advantages another.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Elections should be concerned with choosing among philosophies, ideas and the planning of our future, rather than with tactics and strategy. It is said that politics is war using different weapons, and that is true.

When political parties spend money defining and attacking other parties' leaders instead of debating the direction of our country, that is when the system moves away from democracy and enters a state of conflict, a war waged with different weapons.

When I was very young, I read an article which said that, if Wendy's announced that McDonald's hamburgers are made of mouse meat and if McDonald's responded that Wendy's hamburgers are made of worms, in the end, people just would stop eating hamburgers. That is an excellent metaphor, and one that accurately represents our current political process.

[English]

In a post-truth, strategy-driven era rather than one guided by facts and philosophy, those whose ideas are the least saleable are working hard to suppress the vote. This is not a uniquely Canadian phenomenon, in spite of the unmitigated attack on our democracy that was deliberately and ironically called the "fair elections act".

Making voting mandatory puts the onus on the state to ensure every citizen has the ability to do so. It is one of Canada's great democratic ironies that, of all the pieces of identification available for Canadian citizens to identify themselves at a voting booth in a federal election, it is virtually impossible to use only documentation issued, without charge, by the federal government in order to vote.

That there is no consensus on electoral reform is clear for all to see and I will strongly and unequivocally defend the decision of our government to abandon it unless and until all parties put their narrow partisan interests aside and figure out what is genuinely best for the voters rather than the party leaders of our country.

Indeed, there is tremendous irony to telling Canadians that we need to change our electoral system because some votes cast do not, in some ways of measuring, count, and that we therefore need to change the electoral system to accommodate these votes without the consent of the near unanimity of Canadians. Why would an election reform advocate's vote count more than one who is satisfied with the status quo?

If the problem is that some voters' opinions are seen not to count, it must be the case that any change not leave anyone's opinions out. That is the very essence of consensus.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, even if we do not agree on his argument against proportional representation. However, that is not the essence of today's discussion.

My colleague is arguing against reform, even though his prime minister mentioned during the campaign that this would be the last election under the current system. Not only did the Prime Minister say that during the campaign, but he continued to repeat it until just recently. My colleague himself was elected on the basis of that platform.

The objective of today's debate is then not to make speeches in favour of one system or another, but quite simply to ask my colleague to apologize for having betrayed Canadians. For years the Liberals said they were going to reform the voting system, and today they are saying, "No thanks".

It is a simple matter to apologize. There is no need for big speeches on voting systems. It would suffice to simply take a moment to apologize to Canadians for having betrayed them.

Is my colleague prepared to do that?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, in principle, most of the time in a parliamentary democracy, there is no need for a consensus in order to make a decision, since one can always backtrack in a future Parliament. When it comes to changing the electoral system, however, the whole game has to be changed. That requires a consensus verging on unanimity in the House.

When the unanimous consent of the House is sought and half the members say yea while the other half say nay, the NDP says that consensus has been achieved. That makes no sense.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think my hon. colleague speaks so fast because he has so many ideas in his head. He is certainly one of the smartest people in the House of Commons. Some would say that is faint praise, but I mean it sincerely. He is a genuinely intelligent person. I enjoy serving on committee with him and hearing his well-considered remarks. It is always nice to hear someone who we know wrote his own remarks.

Having said all of that, I want to posit a situation to the member. There has been talk coming from the government about the need to find consensus, and broad buy-in is the term it used at one time. In order to actually achieve a change, a government has to take an initiative, and then in the case of something that is too important to leave to the politicians, the government should put it to the people. A model that looked like it stood a reasonable chance of getting support versus the status quo was what the committee proposed. That would have allowed the majority to decide whether the new system that was proposed would be superior to the existing system, or the reverse, and I imagine arguments could be presented on both sides for any system.

Business of Supply

However, the point is that our system is actually based on the majority. In this place, we do not look for consensus. It is 50% of the members, plus one. Likewise, that is how it works in a referendum. Does he not agree with me that if we want to move forward on this particular issue, where the politicians will always have self-interest, in the end a referendum is the only way of moving from this system to any other system?

● (1540)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, in 2007, I was very involved in the referendum in Ontario. I have seen the electoral reform debate up close and personal. Referendums do serve a purpose. I do not object to them philosophically. They have a role, but here is the thing.

On an electoral reform referendum, if 55% of the population votes for a change and 45% does not, on the basis that 45% of the people's votes did not count, what have we really accomplished? Are we not being extraordinarily ironic in saying a little over half the country agrees with this change, therefore the ones who do not agree, whom we are trying to protect in the first place, do not matter yet again? It seems a great contradiction to me.

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank all of my colleagues who have taken part in this debate, which is a very important one.

I also thank the hon. member of the opposition for having raised this question. I well know that his dedication to the issue of electoral reform is sincere. I congratulate him for his dedication to the vitality of our democracy. I must say that all of the parties share that dedication.

First of all I would like to acknowledge the fact that, in my riding of Hull—Aylmer, some of my fellow citizens are going to be disappointed by the lack of consensus in Parliament. I would like to take formal note of their disappointment.

I must also say that the issue of electoral reform is not confined to changing the voting system. There are many other important steps we could take.

We need only think back to a few years ago when the previous government tabled Bill C-23, or the Fair Elections Act. We all know that there were numerous measures in that bill. We know there was a fairly big consensus in our Parliament on making certain changes. I would like to raise a few of those changes, and also to congratulate the Minister of Democratic Institutions for having proposed them in her speech.

I shall start by setting forth a few principles.

[English]

Canadian democracy, at its core, requires and relies upon our ability to set aside partisan interests and if we disagree to disagree honestly, but to have an honest debate, a respectful debate, especially on matters that affect us all.

As I said, I had a town hall in my riding of Hull—Aylmer. I would like to thank the 35 residents who showed up at this town hall, who joined me at the Université du Québec en Outaouais to discuss this issue. It was a great discussion and it was a valuable one. As I

reported to the special committee on electoral reform, “the participants at the consultation held a diverse set of views” and that my constituents wanted to continue to improve and evolve our democracy.

That is a fair discussion of what we had. That is a fair summary of what we had that night. That is why I am so grateful to my constituents for participating. This why I feel there are so many other elements that we can pursue to improve the electoral system.

Let us talk about some of those issues.

● (1545)

[Translation]

As I said, Bill C-33 contains amendments that are intended to make the views of young Canadians heard and to indicate what we want to change in the regulations.

I would like to focus first on one of those measures, which consists of establishing a register of future electors, in which Canadian citizens 14 to 17 years of age may consent to be included. That measure will reflect the recommendation made by the Chief Electoral Officer after the last election, and goes even further.

The Chief Electoral Officer had asked that he be authorized to retain information about persons 16 and 17 years of age so that they could later be added to the national register of electors.

I would note that this measure also reflects one of the recommendations made by the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. If it receives the support of the House, this legislation will be a formidable tool for young Canadians and for Elections Canada.

Elections Canada could then communicate with young people in order to register them in the national register of electors. In addition, students could be registered in advance, in anticipation of their turning 18.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind individuals that there are people making speeches in the House. If members are having conversations, they should take them out of the House to provide the member with the respect he deserves.

The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, it is a good thing if my speech generates comments from members in the House. I think that speaks to the interest in what I have to say. I know that the member from the Quebec City region agrees with me entirely.

Business of Supply

[English]

I think it is very important for us to understand that there are certain measures we can take to encourage more voting by young people. It is certainly important for us to have this registry of future electors, so that we can bring them on and allow them that opportunity to register so that they can get to vote. We know that once one starts voting and getting involved, chances are that becomes a habit that continues throughout one's life. We all have to work to encourage more people to participate in the democratic process.

A democracy is a very fragile thing, and we have seen expressions of it in previous elections where there has been a declining voter participation.

[Translation]

It is said that this will undermine the legitimacy of the results. It is crucial that we take all possible measures to ensure that these people are able to participate in the democratic process.

I would like to set aside the comments I had prepared and talk about something else. I see that there is a philosophical difference. Some opposition members have said that democracy is 50 per cent plus one, and that is entirely acceptable. It may be because I am a Quebecker, but I feel the need to make enough room for visible minorities, and I think it is very important to try, as much as possible, to find a consensus before making amendments to basic laws.

We are well aware that we have formed a majority government and we could have imposed our will on the House, particularly when it came to the composition of the electoral reform committee created in May 2016. However, we surrendered our majority so that a consensus could be found among all the parties and so that the intention of the House could thus be reflected. I think that is a good reflection of our Liberal values. In a democracy, there can be no tyranny of the majority.

• (1550)

[English]

However, we need to make sure that on fundamental changes, as much as possible, we respect the majority, but we also have to make sure that we respect the minority points of view. As my colleague said previously, if a significant number of people do not approve of it, then we should not go forward. It is something we should not do, although we could.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Hull—Aylmer for his speech.

I know that he is a reasonable MP. I must say I am a little disappointed that he is unable to recognize the successes as well as the failures. I recall that we were talking last evening in the House about successes and failures. We were wondering if we would be capable of recognizing them. I thought he might have taken the opportunity to apologize for having said something during the campaign and for a year and a half before, and then changing his mind. I shall therefore give him another opportunity to apologize in a moment.

That being said, I would like to know why the Liberals did not make clear right from the outset the consensus they were seeking. What is their definition of “consensus”, since that is their current excuse?

There are plenty of examples to choose from in other files, the finest being the Kinder Morgan pipeline. Is there a consensus on that? The member would not be able to convince me that there is a consensus on that in the House today. The Liberals, however, are moving ahead all the same. Today they are using the excuse of the consensus. I wonder if the member can define what a consensus is. If his government intends to lead by consensus, it would be good to know the level of consensus it is seeking before moving ahead on its policies.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Sherbrooke. I am most happy to answer his question.

As I have said, there are two important variables in all of this. The first is to know if it is something irreversible with huge consequences. The envisioned initiative would be far-reaching, because we do not change our voting system every day or from one election to the next. It is an important move. My feeling is that we have to reach a consensus, so far as possible, on the decision to be made. That is why a change of electoral system requires a consensus among all the political parties, so far as that is possible.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, salutations to my hon. colleague from Hull—Aylmer. Without telling my life story, he is my federal MP when I am in Ottawa, since I of course reside in Gatineau. As a good Quebecker, I have a residence in Gatineau. I receive his literature regularly. I thank him and send him my regards.

The member speaks at length about the consensus that we have to have and that we try to reach as often as possible in politics. That consensus existed on the electoral committee. I know he has a great deal of respect for all of his colleagues, especially those in his party, including the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis who chaired that committee so brilliantly. Such respect was not evident in particular among the other members of the government party. Consensus on a referendum was reached among all the opposition parties, that is, the Green Party, the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and us, the Conservatives. In a democracy, the best way of knowing what the people are thinking is to ask them directly and allow all Canadians to express themselves. Why is the Liberal Party refusing to consult Canadians and to join in the consensus reached by all the other parties?

• (1555)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I believe the question by my hon. colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent is a *clever question*.

Unfortunately, that is the only way I can think of to describe it. What I mean is that it's such a nuanced question that it means something to a few people, but nothing to others. The hon. member said there was a consensus to hold a referendum. I challenge him to say whether the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party completely agree on what voting system should be used.

Business of Supply

In fact, in the 14 months since the beginning of this Parliament, I have heard many MPs from those parties say that there was no consensus. They were not talking about the same thing, in relation to the voting system. Some wanted the current system, while others wanted another system. There was no consensus. I challenge him to find this consensus on a specific voting system.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to note that I will be sharing my time with the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Like the 92,000 citizens who signed an online petition on the Parliament of Canada website, urging the Liberal government to live up to its promise of electoral reform, I am deeply disappointed and hurt by this Liberal flip-flop.

The Prime Minister made a commitment to Canadians to change the outdated electoral system in order to improve our democracy. He reiterated this promise more than 1,800 times, including in his Speech from the Throne. In the end, the Liberals changed tack 1,800 times. Canadians feel that they have been deceived, and rightly so.

Many of my fellow citizens in Salaberry—Suroît have also expressed their disappointment. Here is the question they want to ask the Prime Minister: does he no longer want every vote to count as he has repeated so many times?

In an attempt to explain why such a key promise had been broken, two successive ministers of democratic institutions hammered home that there was no consensus, and the Liberals continue to use this pretext without being able to define the word “consensus”, like my colleague from Sherbrooke asked them to. What are the Liberals’ criteria for consensus? They are still unable to answer this question to this day. The Liberals have not been able to define the consensus which they needed to move forward with electoral reform, either within the Special Committee on Electoral Reform or among the citizenry.

Consultations were held, however, including by the Special Committee on Electoral Reform and in my riding. I have the numbers here for my riding because I found them pretty surprising. It would seem that 78% of the residents of Salaberry—Suroît who participated in the survey that I conducted declared that the number of seats that a party has should reflect the number of votes it received. If 78% is not a consensus, I do not know what kind of numbers it would take for the Liberals to see that a majority of the people agree that we need to move forward with electoral reform.

Furthermore, 70% of those surveyed said they would like to see parliamentary work be undertaken in collaboration with all the parties and be supported by all of them. Under any proportional system, the current government would be a minority one. It would have been forced to collaborate with the other parties to implement its policies.

Our electoral system has serious deficiencies. Political scientists have been pointing them out as far back as 1960. The first is the number of non-represented voters. Over 9 million of voters in the 2015 federal election were not represented. The second is the distortion between the results and the ballot itself. In the last election, the Liberal Party received 39% of the votes, 55% of the seats and 100% of the power. If that is not a distortion caused by our outdated

electoral system, I would like to know how the Liberals would qualify this system.

This does allow the Liberals to implement their policies as they see fit and to block initiatives by other parties when they do not fit their ideology or benefit their friends. The people, however, voted by a margin of 63% for parties in favour of electoral reform.

Lastly, a review would not be as divisive as the government would have us believe. A consensus already exists: 90% of the experts and 80% of the members of the public who appeared before the Special Committee on Electoral Reform requested that the government adopt an electoral system with a proportional component.

In other words, the majority of experts and people across Canada agree. Therefore, there is a consensus about having every vote count. We repeated this many times. The Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, and the Green Party also recognized this. Clearly, the Liberal members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform are aware of these figures. How can the Liberals say that there is no consensus? That is really frustrating.

● (1600)

Would the results have been different with a proportional voting system? The Canadian political landscape would be much more representative if a more proportional system were put in place. For example, the Bloc Québécois would be a party recognized by the House and the Green Party would have 11 members on the Hill. Canada is a country that is proud of its diversity; however, the House of Commons is not representative of this diversity.

Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have not sought to improve the voting system. Why change a system that works to their advantage? The government's decision to break its promise only fuels cynicism and undermines confidence in politics, especially in those under 30.

Even though the participation rate of millennials, my generation, was higher in the 2015 election, it was well below the participation rate for all other age categories. I had the opportunity to talk about this with some of them and they told me that they had high hopes for electoral reform.

Although they wanted to give politicians a chance, they did not have a high opinion of our work. They described politicians as being individualistic, cynical, and constantly looking to the next election. These young people felt that the parties did not take into consideration their issues because they were always looking after their personal interests.

To understand the loss of confidence caused by the government, consider what my Liberal colleague for Mississauga—Streetsville said:

When our party announced that 2015 would be the last election under the first past the post voting system, it was an announcement that our government is going to be one that listens to the concerns of citizens, has progressive views, and is truly about real change.

Business of Supply

Congratulations. They are not listening, not progressive, and not changing anything. All they have done is to make many young Canadians even more cynical, and those young people are not dumb. Unfortunately, research shows that young people who do not vote when they first become eligible to do so will likely never vote. It will be extremely difficult to restore their motivation and desire to take part in Canadian democracy once they have completely checked out after the first opportunity has passed.

The Liberals have shattered the hopes of people in their own base. Young Liberals in Quebec emphasized the importance of reforming the electoral system, and I quote, “which forms the foundation of our democracy”. Those are their own words. They reiterated their desire to change the electoral system.

The Prime Minister even appointed himself minister of youth so that he could better listen to them. As it turns out, he has done the opposite, and he is not assuming responsibility for his broken promise. Even worse, he sent a newly appointed young woman to cover for him. What a great example of courage and political accountability.

Does the government not see that its decision to back away from electoral reform will serve only to enhance young people's sense of distrust in politics? It would have been difficult to stoop any lower, but the Liberals somehow managed it.

When the Liberals held 11% of the seats despite getting 18% of the votes, they lambasted our outdated electoral system. Strangely enough, now that they hold nearly 55% of the seats without having received half the votes, they are no longer in such a hurry to change things. The questions on the MyDemocracy.ca survey are the best example of this.

That survey was a tremendous opportunity to once again consult with Canadians after the Special Committee on Electoral Reform released its report. The government sabotaged this opportunity by asking empty and leading questions. At no time did the government ask participants what kind of voting system they would like to have for the country. Is this not a bit ironic and cynical? Canadians did not answer the survey to tell the government whether they are pragmatists or guardians. They wanted to give their opinion on a major reform that would give Canada a more representative electoral system.

Lastly, I would like to respond to the Prime Minister's argument that extremist voices could make their way to Ottawa if we were to change the voting system. This is another case of reigning through fear, as if we needed more of that.

I would respond to this argument by quoting a sentence from a letter published by Katelynn Northam from Leadnow: “A Trump-style candidate could never win over a majority of Canadian voters — but in our broken first-past-the-post system, a hateful candidate could win with as little as 35% of the vote”.

By breaking this promise that it repeatedly made to Canadians, the government is not honouring its office. It raised hopes only to extinguish them a year and a half later. The Liberals have drawn the ire of all those who voted to see a change in the electoral system, including some of their own members. This can only lead to an increased sense of distrust.

● (1605)

I call on the young people sitting on the Prime Minister's youth council to remind him of the desire to change the voting system, ask him why he broke one of his main promises, and ask him to apologize to Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with respect to the member's last point, I want to assure her that I will bring it up. We also have a youth commission and I look forward to the dialogue that we will have there.

Since the election I have had the opportunity to have a great deal of dialogue on this particular issue. Even though I appreciate and I value all of the work of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, and even though I appreciate and value all of the good work that the former minister did on the file with respect to reaching out and trying to get a better idea, and even though I appreciate the thousands of Canadians who participated, let there be no doubt that there was no consensus. Given the lack of consensus, it would have been wrong for the Prime Minister to move forward on this issue.

I would ask the member to be very clear on this. Does she believe that a majority of her constituents have a position on what type of electoral reform they would like to see, not her party—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members that there is only five minutes for questions and answers, so if members could keep them short enough to allow other people to ask questions, that would be great, because people are eating into that time quite widely, and I hate to cut the questions short.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that, even though the Prime Minister has taken on the title of youth minister, he has never been able to respond to a single one of my questions in the House.

On the question of whether my fellow citizens want a proportional voting system, if the member had taken the trouble to listen to my speech, he would know that I said that 78% of my fellow citizens whom I consulted on the issue of the electoral system said that they wanted to change the voting system for one that is proportional.

The Liberals say there is no consensus, even though their mandate never made any mention of consensus. The report's figures state that 90% of the experts and 80% of the population who were consulted by the committee over several months said they wanted a proportional voting system.

● (1610)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît. I am in total agreement with her speech.

I have just one question to ask. In her opinion, why has the government decided to break its clear promise?

Business of Supply

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, I am totally disconcerted, disappointed and frustrated, like thousands if not millions of Canadians who, like my colleague from the Green Party, do not understand it.

What we do in fact understand is that the Liberals were greatly advantaged by the first-past-the-post system. They nonetheless repeated their promise during the campaign, many times in the House of Commons, and even in the throne speech.

Last December 2, and again recently, the Prime Minister was saying: "I make promises because I believe in them. I've heard loudly and clearly that Canadians want a better system of governance, a better system of choosing our governments, and I'm working very hard so that 2015 is indeed the last election under first-past-the-post."

It is shameful for a prime minister to promote another system and not even be able to keep his promise on the pretext that there is no consensus, when 90% of the experts agree that the system should be reformed.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to know how the hon. member can say that the government misled Canadians when we presented that platform in good faith.

All of the Liberal members discussed it. The Prime Minister and the former leader of our party presented this in our platform in good faith.

Why is this being called misleading? It was in good faith—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As time is short, I will now give the floor to the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I cannot believe that the Liberals are so blinded by their own power that they are incapable of realizing that they have reneged on their promise. They repeated more than 1,800 times that they would reform the voting system. They said they needed a consensus, something that was not mentioned in any mandate. They are unable to define the word "consensus". Ninety per cent of experts and 80% of the population agree that a proportional voting system is needed.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague, the member for Salaberry—Suroît, spoke very powerfully to the motion we are discussing here today. This is an NDP motion that we are all very proud of, which is receiving tremendous support across the country. It is certainly a position that is receiving tremendous support across the country. I just want to repeat it for the sake of those who are tuned in or are tuning in.

The motion we put forward today states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government misled Canadians on its platform and Throne Speech commitment "that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system", and that the House call on the government to apologize to Canadians for breaking its promise.

I have heard the consternation from Liberals across, questioning why we are using such strong language, like "misleading". It is

because that is exactly what the Liberals have done. Let us go back into recent history to get a sense of that.

On June 16, 2015, the Prime Minister promised that the 2015 election would be the last federal election conducted under the first past the post system, and that he would present a bill in the House of Commons within 18 months of his election.

On December 4, 2015, the Prime Minister repeated this commitment in his throne speech where he said:

To make sure that every vote counts, the Government will undertake consultations on electoral reform, and will take action to ensure that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system.

On December 17, 2015, in an interview, the Prime Minister said:

It would be easier to do nothing and sit back and just say, 'Okay, you know what, this worked for us, I think we can make this current system work for a few more mandates' ... But that's not the kind of leadership that Canadians expected.

That was the story on February 4, 2016, March 11, 2016, May 11, 2016, October 19, 2016, November 6, 2016, December 1, 2, 5, and 7, 2016, and January 10, 2017, but on January 12 is when the story starts to change. The new Minister of Democratic Institutions twice refused to repeat the Prime Minister's election promise on electoral reform, and avoided the question by saying that she was committed to getting briefed on the file.

What we have seen transpire over the last three weeks is a full, complete turnaround for all of these other statements, and in fact a very clear statement from the government that it is willing to break its promise to Canadians on electoral reform. The Liberals are willing to go that far, and they are using all sorts of excuses in the House which outside of this chamber we would call "lame" to describe what has transpired here. I have never heard such pathetic excuses from any government when it comes to a situation where it has so blatantly broken its promise to Canadians.

I read a quote where the Prime Minister himself mocked the notion that the Liberals would possibly pull away from this commitment, because it was so important to them. This is the height of cynicism in politics. It is why so many Canadians are so frustrated and angry about the way in which the government has broken its promise. The excuses that we are hearing from the government are simply not going to cut it, nor is the reference to no consensus and that 45% only wanted this or that.

We are talking about a government that was elected by 39% of Canadians. It was fine for that percentage to be recognized as a legitimate win, and nobody here is saying that it is not a legitimate government, yet when the Liberals are throwing numbers around like this, it is as though they cannot move forward on this, and they fill in the blank and keep referring to a lack of consensus.

The point here is that the Liberals made a commitment to Canadians. Canadians believed them. Many Canadians voted for them, because they feel deeply about this issue. Now the Liberals have turned around, and like many politicians of the past, they have broken their promise.

Business of Supply

•(1615)

I want to share a few thoughts about an article that came out today. The title of that article is “Millennials finally fall out of love with [the Prime Minister] after he abandons electoral reform”. Obviously, it is a provocative title. However, once one reads the article, there is a logical argument made that for many young people, electoral reform was identified as an important issue. Democratic reform is something young people feel strongly about. It is a system whereby their voices, their issues, are respected and heard in real terms. It is something they feel very strongly about, and they attached these values to a Prime Minister who spoke to many young people and who ultimately made a very clear commitment to young Canadians, and all Canadians, that if he were to be elected, he would make a difference.

Young people, for generations, have had promises to them by governments broken. Once again we are seeing that happen, but this time by a Prime Minister who truly claims to care about young people and the issues that matter to them.

There is a long list of things the Prime Minister alluded to that are not being acted on: the creation of good jobs for young people, and I have spoken many times in this House about the rise of precarious work for the millennial generation; the promise to do things differently when it came to pipelines, and obviously we know that young people are extremely concerned about climate change; and the need to respect the rights of indigenous people.

We know the rhetoric that was thrown around on the commitment by the government to legalize marijuana that was used to get votes from young people. Now we are seeing a very different tone from the government on that issue.

Last week the gallery was full of young people who were here in the hope that the government would live up to the tweet the Prime Minister sent in response to Donald Trump's racist immigration ban. Yet even there they did not see the government act on the kinds of values they and many of us as young Canadians hold so dear.

We are seeing a pattern whereby the government is pulling away from things it promised and issues it said it would stand up for young people on. However, nothing has been more blatant than this particular broken promise, this very obvious walking back from a commitment it made, repeatedly made, in black letters on white paper. I have mentioned the dates. We have all been in the House when the Prime Minister has said it. We heard it from his minister.

I want to acknowledge the thousands of Canadians who engaged in the consultation process the NDP held and those who came to the parliamentary committee meetings across the country. These are people who took time out of their lives, away from their families, and travelled to different communities. They took that time because they felt strongly about this issue. They believed that the current government, as it promised, was actually willing to make a difference.

Not only are we asking the government to apologize, the New Democrats are joining with many Canadians to say that what the government has done is unacceptable. Broken promises are unacceptable. A broken promise on electoral reform, something

that is so fundamental to building a healthy democracy that truly represents us, is unacceptable.

Canadians deserve better, young Canadians deserve better, than a Prime Minister and a government that is willing to mislead us, as we have seen here today.

•(1620)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments and her commitment to bettering democracy. However, although a lot of consultations were done, there was not a clear consensus among Canadians. Would it not have been irresponsible to move forward, with insufficient time to get things in place for the next election, to quickly try to change the system and guess at whether to go this way or that way, when there was not a clear consensus? Would it not have been irresponsible for the government to move in that direction rather than say that for now, we are not moving forward, because there is no consensus, but let us continue to look at how we can make democracy better while we continue to look at electoral reform in the future?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I realize that members across the aisle are speaking from the same playbook on this. I can only imagine how difficult a debate like this would be for them.

The fact of the matter is that the Prime Minister repeatedly indicated, and I quote, “Mr. Speaker, I have said many times that 2015 will be the last election held under first past the post”.

The Liberals' slogan in the last election was “Real Change”. Breaking this promise, a fundamental promise, on electoral reform is the opposite of real change. People expected bold leadership from the Prime Minister. They expected him to stand up for his promises. What we are discussing here is a fundamental broken promise. The Liberals should apologize.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Churchill—Keewatinook Aski for a very impressive presentation.

There is only one part of the NDP resolution with which I might differ. Would it not be better if, instead of an apology, we had a rewritten letter to the Minister of Democratic Institutions to keep this promise on track?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I also want to acknowledge my colleague's commitment to the issue of electoral reform.

Many of us in the House, despite the party we come from, have expressed real opposition to what the government has been doing on this front. As we in the NDP have indicated, we are committed to democratic reform. Proportional representation is something we heard from thousands of Canadians as a model to be followed, and we are certainly keen to push that vision forward.

Obviously here today we want the Liberals to take ownership of breaking the promise they made to Canadians, and we certainly hope they will see the light and their wrong ways and change course as we go forward.

Business of Supply

•(1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech, but particularly for her passion and her knowledge of the subject.

The Liberal slogan of the day is that there is no consensus.

However, it seems to me that, in the last election, the majority of Canadian electors voted for one or another of the parties that were proposing electoral reform. We in the NDP never concealed the fact that we were in favour not only of reform, but also of the introduction of a mixed-member proportional voting system.

If that does not constitute a consensus that can allow work to begin, what does it take for the Liberals to have a consensus?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which is very important. What indeed will it take? That is what we want to know.

The first step is really for the Liberals to acknowledge that they broke the promise they made to Canadians. The consensus excuse is truly unacceptable.

Canadians are angry and frustrated. They believed the Prime Minister's promise. That is why we have tabled this motion. We are asking the Liberals to recognize that they broke this promise and that they obviously need to change course and respect Canadians' demands for electoral reform.

[*English*]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, before I start, I will be splitting my time with my friend and colleague, the hon. member from the Green Party, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. The member has been a strong proponent on this issue. She was a member of the special committee, and I think her voice deserves to be heard in the House today on this important issue, and I look forward to hearing her comments later in today's debate.

This is an important issue before us today, and this is an important motion that has been brought forward. The issue at hand is not necessarily about electoral reform in itself, though that is certainly important. The real issue is the broken promise of the Prime Minister and the Liberal government. The Prime Minister said one thing to get elected, and then once he was elected, he did all he could to muddle the issue, to change the issue, and to eventually drop the issue altogether.

It is a matter of respect, respect for Canadians, certainly respect for Canadian taxpayers, with the \$4.1 million that was spent on this process, respect for Parliament and for us as parliamentarians, and indeed respect for his own caucus and his caucus members who did so much work on this important issue.

This is a broken promise, plain and simple. It is one of the classic examples of the Liberal Party promising something and then the Liberal government breaking that promise, whether it is the small business tax rate promise it broke; whether it is deficit spending, promising \$10-billion deficits and then seeing deficits two or three times that size; whether it is promising that their middle-class tax cut would be revenue neutral and then finding that it is nowhere near

revenue neutral; or whether it is this example right now on the important issue of electoral reform, another promise broken.

I had the great honour and privilege of serving as an associate member of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I had the honour to sub in a few times for different parts of the committee's travels. I was able to attend a number of meetings in Atlantic Canada and in Montreal. Finally, I had the great honour of joining the committee in Iqaluit, Nunavut to hear the important perspective of the north on electoral reform.

It was always interesting at these meetings to hear from experts, from academics, and from partisans and non-partisans alike on electoral reform. A number of important issues were raised by individuals in our time in Iqaluit. One witness in particular, a young Inuk leader, made a very heartfelt presentation to our committee, and his words stuck with me at the time. In the last eight days, since the minister's announcement that the Liberals were breaking their promise on electoral reform, his words seem even more powerful. I want to read them into the record. It is from October 17, 2016, at the special committee's meeting in Iqaluit. He said:

The reason I bring up things like overcrowded housing, poverty, and abuse is that if you're not sure where you're sleeping, or if you're sleeping in shifts, and if you're not sure what your next meal is going to be or when it's going to be, and if you're not sure when the next time you're going to be sexually abused or physically abused will be, who really cares when the next election is?

He went on to say:

I hate to leave you on such a sad note, but that's the reality of the territory.

This individual brought up some great points about governance in the north and some of the challenges of governance. He also raised a number of these unfortunate issues that are all too prevalent in society. I am not saying that this is an excuse for the Liberal Party breaking its promise, because it is not. It is actually a betrayal of people such as this individual, who despite all the challenges that he and his community are facing, the Liberal Party lured him in to the promise that it was going to do something and then broke that promise. This individual gave up his Monday afternoon, on a workday, to speak to the committee, yet the Liberal Party broke its promise and its commitment.

The Conservative Party has been clear on the issue of electoral reform from the very start. Our position has not wavered. We were very clear that when we change the rules of democracy, when we change the rules of the game, every single Canadian should have a say. That was our commitment from day one, and that commitment did not change. In fact, in the final report from the special committee, with consensus, I might add, from parties such as the New Democrats, the Green Party, and the Conservatives, that commitment to a referendum on a proposed change to the electoral system was in there.

We went into this process with an open mind, with the ability, with our three permanent members of the committee, to interact with the witnesses and with other members to come forward with a consensus opinion.

Business of Supply

•(1630)

I would also like to talk a bit about the consultation process. At the beginning of last summer, the then minister of democratic institutions encouraged us as members of Parliament to consult with our constituents through town hall meetings. I might add that it is somewhat patronizing to tell other members of Parliament how they ought to consult with their constituents. It is something we do on a daily basis. We do not need to be told to consult with our constituents, but nonetheless we do consult. I was very pleased to undertake a number of consultation methods in my riding. I sent out a survey in a householder to every single individual household in my riding. I hosted a town hall meeting. I had individual meetings with constituents, and I received emails, social media, phone calls, and a variety of input from different people in my constituency.

A couple of key issues came out of that consultation. The first was certainly that there was a demand. About 80% of respondents felt that there should be a referendum on any proposed changes, and frankly I think that most Canadians would agree with that. Public opinion polling on that matter has been fairly clear: that if we change the way we elect our parliamentarians, a referendum is absolutely necessary. The other important thing that came out of those consultations was that individuals feel there is an important link that must be had between MPs and the electorate.

When the final report did come out from the special committee, that important linkage was highlighted. It showed that the committee took the feedback of Canadians. Recommendation two said very clearly that a system that does not have a link to MPs should not be considered by the government, as such systems sever the connection between voters and their MP. The report that the special committee came up with is indeed a substantial report that is based on strong consultations with individuals in their ridings and individuals who came to the open-microphone sessions and really gave their input.

However, this comprehensive undertaking did not seem to be enough for the Liberal Party, so what did it do? It came out with a website, MyDemocracy.ca. I went to MyDemocracy.ca and I had a good laugh, actually. Unfortunately, it is not a laughing matter; it is an important matter.

Just before Christmas, I submitted an Order Paper question, Question No. 645, asking a number of questions on MyDemocracy.ca, and it got some interesting responses back from the government. First, the cost of this website was \$369,058. That includes HST, in case anyone is wondering. That is over \$350,000 spent on this website. More interesting was the response to part b of the question. It said that this website would provide an educational experience. It was an educational experience, though I am sure not in the way that the Liberal Party thought. It goes on to say that it would help “Canadians understand their own preferences in relation to the characteristics of different electoral systems”.

It would help Canadians understand their own preferences. How condescending, how arrogant that the Liberals think that they need to help Canadians understand their own preferences on electoral reform. This is simply wrong. Canadians are well aware of where they stand on these important issues. We found out from touring the country and from hearing input from Canadians in our communities across the country that they do not need help understanding their

preferences. They know what their preferences are, and unfortunately the Liberal government has failed to understand the consensus that was garnered from this comprehensive report.

Before I wrap up, I do want to highlight this. It has been said often by the members opposite that there was no consensus on this report. In fact there was. If the members in this House read recommendation 12, which had the consensus or the majority of this important all-party committee, there was consensus on a referendum on a proposed system that the government would bring forward with a Gallagher Index of five or less, and that this design be done before a referendum on this issue. It is very clear. That was the consensus by the majority of this all-party committee.

I am very proud to speak today. This is a broken promise, plain and simple. The Liberal Party said one thing; the Liberal government did another.

•(1635)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, the conversation today is ultimately the simplest kind of debate a Parliament can have. It is basic accountability. When a government makes a promise and the government goes and breaks that promise, what ought it to do?

In most normal Canadians' mindsets, the sequence of events is quite logical and basic common morality. As my friend from Vancouver Island said earlier today, his three-year-old twin daughters have learned that if we make a promise and then break the promise, we apologize. We admit it; that is good.

I have watched Liberals get up today, some who have even actually apologized to their constituents and now say that they are proud that they broke this promise. They are proud of their government's decision to betray a black and white promise, one of 29 and counting.

My question is this. The Prime Minister has argued that not only are Canadians too entrenched on the different sides of this issue, but they are also too disengaged from this issue. This logic is so twisted as to just confound any right-thinking observer. What would my friend say is the real reason why the Liberals decided to break this promise to Canadians, such a sacred and clear one?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, there are probably a number of reasons why the Liberal government broke this promise, not the least of which I would say is that they did not get what they wanted. From day one, the Liberal Party has had a preference for a ranked ballot. The Prime Minister has admitted it.

If there was one consensus the committee heard, and many of us heard in our town halls and discussions, it was that Canadians did not support a ranked ballot system. However, the Liberal government certainly had a preference for that system, because it was one that would help them govern in perpetuity almost. That was not a system that Canadians wanted to see. Canadians wanted to see a robust democracy in our country, the ability to have debates, and not see one party dominate the process and rig the system in a way in which it would be the beneficiary.

Business of Supply

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first I would like to thank the Canadians who took part in this conversation over the last year. I had the honour of serving on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform with my colleague across the way.

My memory may be wrong, but I do believe that on our visit to Iqaluit there was a clear consensus against a proportional representation system from that part of the country. It was also telling, in my friend's opening comments, that he said the issue is not really electoral reform. As a first question, I ask him to clarify for the House. Was it not the Conservatives' intent all along just to submarine this process by pushing a referendum with no clear idea of what they might want?

The second question is about the responsible path to achieve electoral reform. We heard a lot of contradictory evidence about the use of a referendum. We heard the NDP argue publicly for months against it, then argue for it, then in its supplementary report argue against it. How is that responsible, and how do we properly find a path to engage Canadians and ensure their validation of a new electoral system, given the complexity of the issue?

• (1640)

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Fredericton, and congratulate him on his promotion to parliamentary secretary. It is well deserved.

He asked two questions. The first was on the referendum issue. Our party has not changed our position on a referendum. We said from day one that we thought the only way we could make a substantial change to the way we elect our parliamentarians was through a referendum. That position was not new. We held that from day one. The fact that we were able to make a recommendation through this report, which included a referendum on an alternative system that was more proportional, was indeed a testament to the hard-working members of the committee, including the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, who was very engaged on this issue from day one and did exceptional work.

The second question was about the responsible path forward. The responsible path forward goes together with the referendum. Only with the support of our Canadian public can we go forward with this. We have done the consultations. We have done a comprehensive study. It is now the responsibility of the government to bring forward legislation and its responsibility to ensure that Canadians have their say on it. That is only done through a referendum on the matter.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Democratic Reform; the hon. member for Bow River, Agriculture; the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay, Foreign Affairs.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I rise today and want to begin by acknowledging that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin of Golden Lake. We say *meegwetch*.

[*Translation*]

Before I begin my speech, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Perth—Wellington. I am delighted that he decided to share his speaking time with me. I would also like to thank the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who was a member of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. We have been working together for several months, and we are working very hard.

Today's debate is on the following motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government misled Canadians on its platform and Throne Speech commitment “that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system”, and that the House call on the government to apologize to Canadians for breaking its promise.

The promise was clearer than that. The Liberals also said they would introduce a bill on electoral reform. However, according to information provided to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, their promise is no more.

[*English*]

As I look at this, I want to take this House, my colleagues who are here today, through what we heard in the electoral reform committee, and then put that up against the question that is before us today. Do I vote for a resolution that says, “That, in the opinion of the House, the government misled Canadians...”?

Let me start with what I specifically heard in my own riding. I sent out a questionnaire to every household in the riding, and the households of Saanich—Gulf Islands filled out forms and sent them back to me by the hundreds, overwhelmingly favouring proportional representation as a new system of voting.

I also held town halls within my riding, and 400 people showed up in Sidney, British Columbia, where I live. In Saturna, a tiny island, we had 80 people and the honour of the former minister of democratic institutions participating. We had about 150 people out on Salt Spring Island. Those were the town halls within my riding.

I also conducted town halls with the Green Party in many communities across Canada. Overwhelmingly, what we heard in those town halls was that people liked this promise. It influenced them to vote. Many people said they had voted Liberal because of that promise. For me, as an individual, I have to say it influenced my vote. I know I am the only member of the opposition who voted for the Speech from the Throne, because that promise meant so much to me, and it was clear, black and white, that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post.

As well, I was honoured to be named and voted by this House as a member of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I want to say that we had great leadership, as my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent mentioned just moments ago, from the chair, the member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

We worked together as a team. We worked very hard. We heard from thousands and thousands of Canadians and virtually every expert on electoral reform from within Canada and from around the world.

Business of Supply

We discovered, when we dug deep into this issue, that we were not the first parliamentary committee to study whether first past the post was a good voting system for Canada. The first committee was actually in 1921, and it concluded that it did not serve Canada well, that in any democracy that had more than two parties, first past the post would distort the results and result in elections of parties that were not supported by the majority of Canadians but that would enjoy majority power.

Some of the evidence was very compelling, and I could go on at length but I will not have time now. However, I will just say that the evidence was overwhelming that proportional representation would serve Canada better.

• (1645)

We heard from one of the preeminent global experts by video conference from the University of California, Professor Arend Lijphart, who has a seminal work *Patterns of Democracy*. He studied every single election in 36 democracies from 1945 to virtually now to see if there was a difference between what he described as the majoritarian systems using first past the post or ranked ballots within first past the post. He also studied consensual democracies, which are those with proportional representation. He found on average 7% higher voter turnout in those countries that have proportional representation, a much higher representation of women, marginalized groups, and ethnic minorities in countries with PR, but perhaps surprisingly, stronger environmental regulations and better macroeconomic performance.

The bugaboos about proportional representation that will lead to extremists getting into Parliament and so on have been disproved over and over again, including in the text of our report. We recognize it is a risk but with either a mixed member proportional system with a threshold or with using single transferable vote, the electorate is not going to give a seat to an extremist party. If the government looked at the recommendations of our committee it would see that we clearly said we would specifically not advise using the system used in Israel or any system where people vote purely on a party. We want to make sure that our democracy always has that link between a local MP and ensures proportionality.

With the time I have left I will now turn to the specifics of this resolution, that the government misled Canadians in its platform and in the Speech from the Throne. Every speaker on behalf of the government has today denied that there was any intent to mislead nor that the government actually misled anyone. The words “good faith” have been used. It states it made this promise in good faith.

The only way we are going to get fair voting in Canada is if we can somehow get past partisanship, which we nearly did in our committee. If we would have had more time, if we would have had a consensus-based process within our committee instead of falling to default at the end of voting and so on, we could have arrived at a conclusion with which we could all agree. I cannot reveal what happened in camera.

To suspend partisanship and to suspend disbelief, as a member of Parliament I have two choices here. I can either accept there was a deliberate attempt to mislead Canadians by making a promise with no intention of keeping it, or I can accept the words of all my Liberal colleagues that there was good faith, that there was no intent to

mislead. That leaves only one conclusion, and that conclusion is that the Liberals still want to keep this promise but they just cannot figure out how. Those are the two choices we have. We are either facing a government that misled us as Canadian voters and as members of Parliament, or we are dealing with a Prime Minister and ministers and a cabinet who cannot figure out where we go from here.

We heard from the former parliamentary secretary today, the member for Ajax. I am not paraphrasing. I took notes as he was speaking. He said the government did not see a clear path forward. The Prime Minister himself in this place has never once said he was wrong. He never once said that first past the post is a good system, and thank goodness for that. That means we can still infer that the Prime Minister would rather keep his promise than break it.

What can we do now? Can we help the government by putting this promise back in the front window so it will not break faith with the Canadians who believed in the Liberals and believed that promise?

How do we do that? Fortunately, there are numerous ways forward. If the Prime Minister was rash in promising he would get rid of first past the post by 2019, what if we did a path over a period of elections? By 2019 there will be, if we were to take it incrementally, some additional seats under mixed member proportional or if we were to take it under single transferable vote, we would cluster most of the ridings in urban Canada and areas where they would be clusterable for those who understand the system. In other words, there are places for a landing ground where we can make the promise work.

We must not leave the future of Canada's democracy with a system so perverse that a minority of the voters can give majority power to an extremist, future demagogue/false populist, alt-right, whatever we can imagine, or for my friends in the Conservative Party, extremist left-wing. We need the kind of Parliament that reflects how Canadians actually voted. That is the heart of democracy. That is the heart of the promise, and it must be kept.

• (1650)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands not only for her comments today but for her tireless work on the electoral reform committee.

She is right when she describes the mood and atmosphere, and the collegiality, I would add to her description, between members from different political parties from all corners of the country. It was so inspiring to hear from Canadians, who came out at all of our town halls and events, sometimes in incredibly large numbers, wrote to the committee with briefs and their opinions, and expressed that faith, because they, too, heard the words of the Prime Minister when he talked about this promise.

Business of Supply

I will quote something he said just recently. He stated, "I will not make a cynical promise to enact reforms that everyone knows are impossible."

Canadians think that all politicians are the same, he told the crowd, "But I know it's not true.... We need to show Canadians that real change is possible."

That message resonated with Canadians, particularly young Canadians.

My question to my friend is this. As parliamentarians go back out to Canadians and young Canadians to encourage them to come into the democratic conversation about the health of our country, which, as the Prime Minister says, is still important, what do we tell those who had faith in the Liberal Party and in the Liberal Prime Minister, after they have so callously thrown aside a promise and refuse to this moment to at least have the decency to apologize for having broken that commitment and betraying the faith of Canadians?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, my friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley spoke of working tirelessly. We worked very hard across party lines, and I mean all party lines: Liberals, Conservatives, NDP, Green, and Bloc. However, certainly no one worked harder than the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

It is heartbreaking. I know how I felt, because I believed the promise. I would not have worked so hard and felt that it mattered so much had I thought it was remotely possible that the Prime Minister would say that the government did not mean to keep that promise anymore because it was too hard. I do not understand why this promise is different from other platform promises.

The Liberals promised to bring in carbon pricing, and I know there is no consensus on that. I support bringing in carbon pricing. Personally, I have a different favourite form of carbon pricing. The debates are very similar between carbon pricing and electoral reform. There are a lot of different factions that want carbon fee and dividend or cap and trade, but one does not break a promise without paying a price in breaking people's hearts.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate all of the hard work of the committee to arrive at some consensus, so let us dispense with the first part of her proposition, that it was always the government's intention to break the promise and move on from there, because that is kind of a fruitless exercise.

In order to go to the second part of her proposition that has been argued here today, that there is no clear path forward, the Conservative Party, the Green Party, and the New Democratic Party have argued for a referendum and, as we well know, a referendum has to have a clear question so that it yields a clear response.

In order for this to go forward, out of the lack of consensus of her report and the literally thousands and thousands of people who have been consulted, could she tell us in a very simple way what she thinks a clear question would be to put to the Canadian people, were we to go forward with a referendum?

•(1655)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I certainly do not agree that the report that was tabled lacked consensus. It was a majority report. I do wish it had had all five parties around the table in agreement.

The clear question was the one that we put in the report. People would have a choice in a referendum between the current system and moving to proportional representation. However, if we were to take my suggestion from today for how we fix this now and take it out over a couple of elections, the government could actually postpone the referendum until people are actually very familiar with a system and a government, in its capacity as governing, the executive, and bringing legislation forward. We could have a system where we have an experience of putting our toes in the water, so to speak, in 2019, a bit more in 2023, and we could pair up a referendum.

A stand-alone referendum would cost \$300 million. We could put a referendum on the same day as a general election. Then we would have a confirmatory vote and no one would ever say the government had pushed something down anyone's throat.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Victoria.

Today's debate reminds me of a quote from a famous television show. It makes me think of George Costanza from *Seinfeld*, who was known for his loosey-goosey relationship with the truth. He said:

[English]

It's not misleading if you believe it.

•(1700)

[Translation]

I will let the House figure out which words I had to change to make sure I was using parliamentary language. This is a bit like what we are seeing with the Liberals today. They seem to believe that they did not break this promise. They would have us believe that they did not fuel cynicism with their actions, when they neutralized every human and financial effort made over the past year. The consultations that were held cost \$4 million. All of that has gone out the window.

Last summer, I had the opportunity to fill in for some of my NDP colleagues on the committee and hear the expert testimony. I can say that those experts, even those who did not necessarily agree with the mixed member proportional option, did not hesitate to say that the arguments against the system coming from across the aisle were nonsense. The members opposite argued that this system was not stable and that it favoured extremist parties, including those on the far right and those that promote identity politics. Even though this was not the system that these experts would have chosen, they did not hesitate to say that those arguments were patently false.

Business of Supply

What I find troubling is that a situation was created that fuelled hope. We worked for one year consulting people and creating a consensus, as they always say on the other side. After all, everyone in politics knows very well that we will never have 100% support from Canadians for any policy we want to implement. If we waited until we had the support of 100% of the population to implement a policy, we would do nothing. We have to accept that there will always be some who disagree.

In view of the fact that a committee with the proportional representation of the parties in the House of Commons managed to produce a report that represented the will of the majority of the parties sitting on the committee, I think that we can say that we achieved a consensus. Let us be honest, that is a rare occurrence in the House of Commons. In fact, there was a greater consensus about what was in the committee's report than there is for most government policies.

Now the government is justifying its decision to maintain the status quo on the grounds that there is a lack of consensus. That is interesting because the government has no problem going ahead with all of its other policies despite the fact that there is far less consensus about the other components of its election platform.

The motion before us today is very important because when members and candidates go door to door in our ridings to meet voters, we all experience the same thing. Inevitably and unfortunately, every time we knock on a door, the people answering say they appreciate our work, our party, or our leader, then they say that they do not want to waste any more time on broken promises and politicians who say whatever it takes to get themselves elected. They say, "Sorry, I'll pass", and shut the door. Some of us are more persistent; we try to regain people's trust and talk about why they feel cynical.

Sometimes we manage to restore their trust in politicians, but unfortunately, people all too often want nothing to do with us. They are cynical because of situations like the one we are discussing today.

It was a Prime Minister, leader of his party, who repeated thousands of times that he was going to keep this commitment and that it was so important for him to keep his word. He said it was at the core of his work, not only as an MP, but also as the Prime Minister and as a person, all with his hand over his heart, of course. This is what is feeding people's cynicism, especially the segment of the population that is supposedly so important to the Prime Minister, who is also Minister of Youth: young people.

This week my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley hit the nail right on the head in question period. He said that what was most disappointing was not hearing people say that they would never vote for the Liberal Party again. It was hearing people say that they would never vote again, period. Earning voters' trust is extremely difficult; not only so that voters will go and vote for a certain candidate, but so that voters will vote at all. We want people to take an interest in politics and to have confidence in all elected officials.

We can agree that 100% or 99.9% of the people who are here in the House are here for the right reasons. It is possible that some are not. In general, however, everyone is here for the right reasons.

When the Prime Minister keeps telling Canadians he is committed to keeping his promise, then turns around and breaks his promise, that hurts us all. In fact, I have that wrong: it is not that he told Canadians, it is that he wrote it in a mandate letter and asked his minister to defend this to Canadians.

Every political party feels the heat from a move like that. When we go back to our ridings, regardless which party we represent or which file we are working on in the House of Commons, we are forced to justify something that undermines Canadians' trust in politicians of every stripe. This is tremendously disappointing to me, but above all, it is disappointing to the people I represent.

That is why we are calling on the Prime Minister to take the time to apologize to Canadians. A broken promise is not just an unmade policy. It also represents lost political capital for every elected member, which slows down all of the projects we may have for our society. It represents a drop in the public's confidence in us.

The government is trying to justify its position by debating the different systems proposed, but that is not what it is all about. The Liberals lacked courage. We even made some concessions. We worked with our Liberal colleagues and were prepared to hold a referendum if necessary. However, the government wanted nothing to do with it.

All the work that was done over the beautiful summer by members who remained at their desks working hard to get a consensus was tossed aside without even a word from the Prime Minister. This undermines all Canadians' confidence in politicians. For that reason, the Prime Minister should apologize to everyone we represent.

• (1705)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his speech.

[*English*]

I have heard a lot today about this issue of consensus that was allegedly found in the electoral reform committee's report. I read the report carefully. First of all, the Liberals did not agree with the report, so right away, one of the parties did not agree.

Then we have the Conservatives, the NDP, the Greens, and the Bloc that allegedly agreed there should be a referendum on proportional representation. By the way, I agree with the Conservatives that there has to be a referendum to change the way we elect people. I absolutely agree with that.

However, in the case of the NDP and the Greens, they actually provided a second report which said:

While it remains an option, we have serious concerns about holding a referendum on electoral reform. The evidence for the necessity of change is overwhelming; the evidence for the necessity of holding a referendum is not.

If the government decides it must hold a referendum—

Let me ask, where is the consensus if the Conservatives do not actually agree with proportional representation and the NDP does not agree with a referendum?

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[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain to my colleague the difference between a dissenting report and a supplementary report. A supplementary report can be submitted to explain a point of view on an issue. However, in the end, the main report is the one that is accepted, along with its recommendations.

The fact remains that Liberal members are wondering why they did not propose at least a referendum or something else. I have been an MP for almost six years and I can say that all committees do excellent work. However, it is always very difficult and arduous to come up with a report that reflects the will of the majority on the committee. I am not talking about the will of the party in power, but of the will of the majority of the committee members. My colleague did not make this distinction in his question.

We reached a point where every party was willing to compromise except for the Liberal Party. That was most of the parties on the committee. Having worked on other issues as tough as this one, I can say if that is not consensus, I do not know where the government will find consensus for all of its other policies, because that was the broadest consensus it has had since coming to power.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his speech and also for what he has just said. He said that sometimes a consensus cannot be found. This is the question. The government has acted on things like pipelines where NDP members were not in consensus. It made a decision on those pipelines. That is part of governing. That is part of being accountable.

Does the member feel that government members are hiding behind the sense that they need to have a consensus, that a consensus needs to magically form for them to do anything, or does he believe that this is just a distraction to avoid political damage?

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Consensus is a rare thing in politics, so rare as to be practically non-existent, but the fact is we put together a committee that represented all of the parties in the House of Commons proportionally. Most of the parties that made up the committee managed to contribute to the report even though there were supplementary reports.

That is not the issue though. The issue is whether, as my colleague so aptly said, the government is trying to hide behind the lack of consensus. I am really looking forward to its next unpopular decision. I hope the government will roll back every other decision that raised the ire of the opposition and the people on the grounds that there was no consensus. When there are demonstrations outside MPs' offices on certain issues, I hope they will apologize and reverse their decisions because of a lack of consensus. I would be surprised if they did. The government is obviously two-faced and just wants to throw all of our work in the trash. It is so disheartening. I hope they will apologize.

● (1710)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate with the hon. member for Victoria, I will let him know that there are only about four minutes left in the time remaining for the business of supply for this afternoon, but we will get started.

The hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this motion, although I deeply regret that I have only four minutes to do so.

The announcement made last week that the government would break its promise on electoral reform is deeply disappointing to me as a parliamentarian. I know that it was equally disappointing and frustrating to my constituents, the people of Victoria, a community of engaged citizens with one of the highest voter turnout rates in the country.

In the last election, 63% of Canadians voted for parties committed to electoral reform. In Victoria, that figure was nearly 90%. Therefore, when I hear members from the other side of the House talk about what they term as a “lack of consensus” or “declining interest from Canadians”, I cannot for the life of me figure out what they are talking about.

I come from a community that cares deeply about political engagement and progress. Electoral reform is a familiar and important issue to my constituents. Three years ago, I held a town hall where hundreds and hundreds came out to hear from experts on how we might fix our electoral system. I have met with advocates and experts on dozens of occasions in my community, at the University of Victoria and elsewhere. Therefore, to hear government members assert with no discernible evidence that Canadians are not interested anymore in fixing the voting system is deeply frustrating. I have had people come and petition, and work with organizations for years to find a better, fairer, more proportional electoral system.

What really troubles me the most is what I hear from young Canadians. For many young voters, the Harper government was all they knew. They grew up frustrated with a government that did not match their values. They volunteered for environmental causes, but saw the government impede climate action. They studied science and politics at school, but watched their government muzzle scientists and make it harder for them to vote. Therefore, in 2015, they seized an opportunity to make a lasting change. Turnout rose among the 18- to 24-year-old demographic more than any other.

Last week, two writers in *Maclean's* magazine summed it up, one of whom, Scott Baker, is a young man in my community whom I have known for his entire life. Here is what they said:

By killing electoral reform, [the] Prime Minister...has cut down the democratic aspirations of hundreds of thousands of young Canadians, tacitly teaching them to expect less from government and dream smaller political dreams.

Citizens do not start out disengaged but rather become so through their repeated efforts to work within a stubbornly unresponsive system.

Some of us in this chamber have grown cynical about the many promises we have heard from Liberal and Conservative governments, but it is not age that makes us cynical, it is experience. The government had a chance to change that. The Liberals had an opportunity to make good on the promises that they made to young Canadians to earn their votes, and in doing so, not only make progress on many issues, but also reaffirm the faith of young voters that their votes truly matter.

It is not an immutable law of governing that promises are made to be broken. It is a choice that too many governments have made when they start putting their own interests before the interests of the millions of Canadians who voted for change.

In light of the short amount of time that I have for debate, I would like to conclude by calling on every member opposite to consider what they can do to demonstrate to their constituents by joining us in supporting this motion. Some colleagues opposite have already apologized to Canadians, and I commend them for their courage and their integrity. All members can show that our politics are bound by that most basic code of everyday life: that one makes good on one's word, that promises matter, and that when one falls short, one apologizes.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, February 14, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

I see the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons rising on a point of order.

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find consent to call it 5:30 at this point so that we can start private members' business.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FEDERAL FRAMEWORK ON POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER ACT

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC) moved that Bill C-211, an act respecting a federal framework on post-traumatic stress disorder, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-211. However, before I get into my speech, I want to first acknowledge and thank the first responders, the veterans, and the active military members who have emailed, called, and with whom I have met in person. Many of them are on the Hill with us today. I want to

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acknowledge their courage in coming forward, and their fight to break the stigma and the silence. These are brave men and women who have been ridiculed, shamed, told to "suck it up and move on", told that they are making it up, that they are faking it, and, worse yet, that they are weak. I want to thank them for trusting me enough to share their stories with me.

I also want to thank the family and friends of those who could no longer fight for their strength, and their commitment to ensure their loved ones are remembered and that their fight was not in vain.

Moreover, I want to apologize to all for it taking so long to get to this point. I have had this speech prepared for a while now, and as I wrote it, I took time to reflect on the hundreds of individuals whom I had the privilege of meeting with over the last year, those who helped get this bill off the ground, and the thousands more who continue to live in silence.

Mr. Speaker, today is not about you or I, or our colleagues. This is not a Conservative, a Liberal or an NDP issue. Today is about the brave men and women who serve our communities and our country without hesitation and without fail.

I would like to read an email that I received about two weeks ago. It states:

"Our paramedics and other first responders in Canada are amazing. We demand they show up for anything, at any house [at any time] in any weather. They fix our injuries, treat our sickness, restart our hearts. Then they wash their hands, head for home, and rise again to answer the call of duty. They do this job...without thanks, because they want to heal and ease pain. They do this job without fanfare or pursuit of fame, and then feel like they get tossed to the curb when the stress builds up too much. Our first responders across Canada need to be treated like the heroes and humans they are. This Bill needs to pass."

There is no rescue for the rescuers. This is just one email, one story, but there are thousands more like it across our country.

One week after being elected, on October 19, 2015, I arrived in Ottawa as a newly elected MP for the riding of Cariboo—Prince George. I had with me two documents and a head filled with big ideas. The first document was an analysis of challenges and opportunities that existed in my riding. The second was the background for Bill C-211.

Over the course of the two years I spent campaigning, both to win the Conservative nomination and the general election, I met with people from all walks of life. I heard deeply personal and intimate stories of hardship and pain. Many of these individuals were struggling with PTSD themselves, or they knew a colleague, a friend, or a family member who had contemplated suicide or had taken his or her life. They experienced the pain and suffering that was a result of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Bill C-211 was born out of these stories, because it was through these stories that I realized there was no standard of diagnosis, care, treatment, or even terminology for PTSD that was consistent from one end of our nation to another.

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The outpouring of letters and phone calls that my office has received since the bill was first introduced last year has been overwhelming. The stories are overwhelming. I have worked hard to meet with individuals and organizations across the country. They are only asking for proper care to be made accessible to our front-line warriors, those who have dealt with the sights, sounds, and smells that average Canadians would find horrifying and heartbreaking.

Our brave men and women put their uniforms on every day, knowing full well that they may have to take the life of another person during the course of their service to our communities and our country, or that in their service and their dedication to our country, they may indeed make the ultimate sacrifice themselves.

• (1720)

Bill C-211 seeks to establish a cohesive and coherent national framework to ensure our military, first responders, paramedics, police personnel, firefighters, emergency dispatchers, veterans, and correctional officers get timely access to the resources they need to deal with PTSD.

The bill sends a message to our silent sentinels that this is not a battle they have to fight themselves, that someone is fighting for them. It is up to all of us, federal, provincial, and territorial legislators, to come up with a plan to ensure that no one is left behind; that our terminology and laws are consistent across the country, from the east coast to the west coast, so an RCMP member serving in Nova Scotia has consistent care with his or her colleagues across our nation; so a firefighter who is not well has the courage to come forward and say "I am not well"; that our veterans or current military know that just as they stood tall for our families, someone is fighting for them, that they know they are not alone, that they can get the care and attention they need when they need it, wherever they need it.

Bill C-211 is about being human. It is about taking a stand. It is not about assigning blame, not passing the buck, not turning a blind eye and saying that it is not our problem. Bill C-211 is about breaking the stigma of mental health injuries. It is about helping them build the courage to come forward and tell their story and seek help.

I have been told over the course of the last year that PTSD is a provincial matter, that this is an issue for the industry to solve. I have also been told that people should know what they are getting themselves into when they sign their job contracts and go into service. I want to reiterate that it is up to all of us to come up with solutions, because lives are being lost.

We are inundated in the media of stories of another veteran or another first responder who have taken their lives and lost the fight due to PTSD. This is unacceptable. Since I tabled my bill over a year ago, countless lives have been lost. This is shameful. We must do better. This begins with education and a willingness to listen without judgment, because less known to the general public are the mental demands that these occupations face. This includes working in a profession that regularly exposes them to graphic scenes and images that anyone would find disturbing and difficult to see.

My bill focuses on first responders, veterans, and military. Even in these three groups, we have differing terms, references, and sector

inclusion. Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with a gentleman by the name of Mark Farrant. He shared with me that jurors, who in accepting their civic duty swear an oath to the crown, in fulfilling their duty to the crown were subject to the horrific crimes committed. They bear witness to graphic details and images over the course of their duty, whether it is nine days, nine months, or 19 months. Then, just as they are sworn to secrecy, they are turned out in anonymity to somehow reconnect in our communities, void of the experience and human tragedy that they have witnessed. They are tossed aside.

While not part of this legislation, it is my hope that bringing this forward and speaking to it tonight, the Minister of Justice can perhaps review this issue, and it can be part of our national discussion regarding mental health. We can talk about those who are impacted by this.

The reality is that experiencing human tragedy affects us all differently. Just as one story is not the same, there is not a one-size-fits-all treatment. These incidents and experiences cannot be erased from our memory. One cannot just hit reset. Instead, the images, sights, sounds, and smells keep playing on a continual loop. Simple things can trigger anxiety attacks or severe depression.

• (1725)

Staff Sergeant Kent MacNeill of the Prince George RCMP told me recently that for over 16 years he has served as an RCMP in his community. Over eight of those years he has led serious crime investigations. Just in his daily commute, he passes by two sites of horrific crimes. A simple action of dropping his daughter off at school can trigger his PTSD.

Triggers can come at any time and any place, without warning. A noise, a sight, a sound, or a smell can trigger the debilitating effects of PTSD. Most of us can never imagine what our warriors go through on a daily basis. I know there are practical questions that members across the way may be asking. Will there be a cost for implementing a national framework for PTSD? The simple answer to this is yes, it will cost money, but I counter with this. What is the alternative? What is the cost of inaction? How many more lives are we willing to lose before the government, before we, step up to the plate?

If members on all sides choose to vote down Bill C-211, what then are we proposing as a substitute? What is the message we are sending to those who we trust to be there when we are in need, those who without hesitation answer when the world calls? The question we need to ask ourselves today is what value do we place on these brave men and women?

Private Members' Business

Right now, we have a piecemeal system of scattered provincial legislation. Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have all taken steps to rightfully adopt legislation to deal with PTSD. While we are making progress on this front and we have come a long way in recognizing PTSD, leadership is needed at the federal level. The standard of care varies from one province to the next, and we have people falling through the cracks. Individuals suffering from PTSD have an 80% higher risk of suffering from depression, anxiety, alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicidal thoughts. As a society and as legislators, we have failed to come up with solutions to help our heroes, our warriors, the families, and the survivors, because a hero in the east should be treated the same as a hero in the west. Let us get this bill to committee so that we can discuss it, and amend it if necessary. Even with this, we have studied this enough to recognize that much more needs to be done and action is required.

Last October, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security tabled the report, "Healthy Minds, Safe Communities: Supporting our Public Safety Officers through a National Strategy for Operational Stress Injuries". Bill C-211 was tabled before this committee, and I had the opportunity to participate in that study also. The report echoes much of what I am saying today, and indeed the minister's own response to the committee report said:

...the Government acknowledges the needs articulated by Canada's public safety officers and agrees that, in recognition of the daily challenges that are unique to public safety officers in the community, national leadership and alignment are necessary in order to effectively address this multidisciplinary issue.

Bill C-211 is a perfect place to start and is in line with the government's own commitments. Therefore, it is my hope that we can move swiftly, because we will save lives. Every minute wasted, every hour wasted, and every day wasted, we are losing lives. Action is needed. We are at a crisis level.

As I near the end of what I know is a very long speech, I would like to acknowledge that I am the first one to admit when I stand up in this House that it is usually to act as a voice of opposition to the issue of the day, but Bill C-211 transcends party lines and partisan squabbles. It is an opportunity for all parliamentarians to stand together and acknowledge the very real impact that PTSD has had on the lives of our warriors. If members would bear with me, I just want to read an excerpt from another website:

I get up all hours of the night and check the house over and over. I don't even know what I am looking for. I was asleep about a month ago, and I just knew that someone had fired a gun in my living room. I hear people pound on my door in the middle of the night, when in fact there was never anyone there to my knowledge. One night I got up out of the bed.... I don't know what I was looking for, but on my way through the house, I cocked my weapon. On the way through the house, the .357 discharged and shot a hole through my floor.... I need help, but I have dealt with it for the past two years. It is getting harder to deal with.

By nature, our first responders are part of a culture that frowns upon weakness. The job comes first, and feelings, wellness, and family come second. When lives are affected by PTSD, families are left behind to pick up the pieces on their own. Families are forgotten. Only through bipartisan support and co-operation can we hope to achieve effective and viable strategies, terminology, and education to help deal with PTSD.

Through Bill C-211, we have the opportunity to recognize the sacrifices that our brave men and women have made so we can be

here today. Our warriors are our silent sentinels protecting our Canadian values and our way of life. They ensure our maple leaf stands tall, that Canada remains the true north strong and free.

• (1730)

As parliamentarians, let us stand in solidarity in support for those who are willing to give their lives to protect ours. I am asking for the assistance of members today so that we can begin to work on a national framework, and I ask that all members in this House help in achieving this goal by voting for Bill C-211 at second reading, because lives are at stake.

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

Mr. Speaker, I think it is really important that we do recognize that this is a very serious issue. I appreciate the many words the member has put on the record in introducing the bill. Whether it is members of our Canadian Forces, our first responders, the police, or many public safety officers, there are so many horrific acts that do occur that have had a significant impact on the individual in question.

There is no doubt that as a government we need to do more. We can always do better, as the Prime Minister has said. It is one of the reasons that, even when I was in opposition, I talked so passionately about the importance of a health care accord. It is one of the reasons why I think it is so important that we recognize how many hundreds of millions of dollars we are committing now, going into mental health services.

We need to start to take action where we can. I appreciate what the member is bringing forward for us today. My question is to maybe just ask him to emphasize how important it is that there is a holistic approach that does include multiple departments, different levels of government, and so forth. I think that is quite admirable and—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague. I cannot help but hear perhaps, and maybe wrongly, a dismissive tone.

I absolutely agree that a holistic approach needs to be taken, that all departments need to be included in this, and that is why we called on the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and the Minister of National Defence to get together with our provincial legislators and territorial legislators as well as academics, the military, and the industry to have that holistic approach, to really take a look at what we are seeing, because right now people are hurting and people are struggling because there is not consistent care, consistent treatment, or consistent diagnosis, and if we fail today, I shudder to think where we will be.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his work on this file. I also want to thank a resident of Chambly, Patrick Dufresne, a paramedic from Quebec who is in Ottawa today to work on my colleague's bill. In fact, he was the one who alerted me to the importance of working on this matter.

As the NDP public safety critic, I was able to take part in the committee work and my colleague attended a few meetings with us. The committee issued a unanimous report on the need to take action on this matter.

Since this is more of a comment than a question, I will leave it to my colleague to talk in more detail about what needs to be done. Most of all, I want to thank him for his work, although much remains to be done on something like this.

• (1735)

[English]

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, there are colleagues from all sides of the House who are passionate on this and who worked in the committee.

The terms “first responder”, the term “public safety officer”, and the terms “PTSD” and “OSI”: standard care and diagnosis need to be done. The report that was done by the public safety and security committee was a great report, because it identified exactly what we are talking about today, that there needs to be work done. We need to get people together.

I agree with my hon. colleague that there is much work to be done, but it has to start somewhere, and today is the day.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to sincerely thank my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George for all the work he has done on this file and his leadership. He is a very modest man, but to get this to where it is today, I know that he has garnered support from all over the country.

I do know he wants to take a moment just to thank some of the other people who really did help make this day come forth, and I would like to give him that opportunity right now.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I want to thank the public safety committee for tabling such a great report that specifically detailed the need for this.

I also want to thank Communities for Veterans, Paul and Terry Nichols, our Prince George Fire Fighters Union Local 1372, Badge of Life, Gary Rubie, Syd Gravel, Bill and Lynn Rusk, Natalie Harris, Jody Mitic, Vince Savoia of Tema Conter Memorial Trust, Dr. Katy Kamkar, Erin Alvarez, our own Hon. Erin O'Toole, John Brassard, Colin Carrie, Kent MacNeill, and Norm Robillard.

Many of those name are unknown, but they came forward to tell their story. They came forward to try to save a life, not just their own but they came forward. I want to acknowledge that there are many people here today on the Hill who have shared their story with me in the hopes of not just ending their own struggle but ensuring that those coming behind them do not have to struggle, that we can do everything in our power to put those pieces in place, to make sure that we do not lose another life.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank the member for Cariboo—Prince George for bringing this very important issue before the House, an issue that is silently affecting many Canadians every day.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a matter close to the hearts of many, even in the House, as the member has said. Some members have honourably served on the front lines of emergencies. Some have families and loved ones whose lives have been touched by those working tirelessly to protect them. In fact, my grandfather immigrated from England, serving the Royal Engineers in World War I, and spent many months in the Brandon sanatorium, being treated during a time when there was very little known about these disorders.

The government stands proudly behind our country's police officers, paramedics, and firefighters. We stand behind indigenous emergency managers, correctional officers, 911 dispatchers, and border guards. We stand, of course, behind the members of our armed forces and all of the brave women and men who have pursued the noble path of public service and put their safety and well-being at risk for the sake of their communities and their country.

In the Liberal platform, we committed to developing a national action plan on post-traumatic stress disorder and the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness instructs him to “Work with provinces and territories and the Minister of Health to develop a coordinated national action plan on post-traumatic stress disorder, which disproportionately affects public safety officers”.

Indeed, the research shows that between 10% and 35% of first responders will develop post-traumatic stress injuries in their lifetime. An estimated 70,000 Canadian first responders have already been diagnosed. That is why I am proud to say that our government is hard at work developing the action plan to address post-traumatic stress disorder among public safety officers that we promised during our campaign.

Immediately after our government took office, Public Safety Canada launched an extensive consultation process, beginning with sessions in Ottawa and Regina, to hear from stakeholders about PTSD, other operational stress injuries, and about what kinds of supports they needed. As part of these consultations, we heard directly from public safety officers, as well as from health care practitioners, and all levels of government.

We heard about barriers people face when seeking assistance. We heard about cases of limited access to treatment options, the challenges of geographic isolation, and a general lack of awareness regarding operational stress injuries and PTSD, including a lack of awareness about the symptoms and available supports. We agree with the many voices who told us that much more needs to be done.

Private Members' Business

In particular, we heard about the need to address three key themes: research and data collection; prevention, early intervention, and stigma reduction; and support for care and treatment. Stakeholders' voices have recently been bolstered by a report from the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, as was mentioned. That committee also heard from a wide range of organizations and individuals, including the Canadian Police Association, the Mood Disorders Society of Canada, and many experts on psychiatry and mental health.

At this point, I want to mention that Mood Disorders Society of Canada is in my riding of Guelph. In fact, Phil Upshall, the society's executive director, has made it clear to me that our nation needs to do more to assist those who suffer from this condition, especially when so many who are afflicted by it are our nation's service members or first responders.

Another unique Guelph organization that is leading the nation in treating PTSD is Homewood Health Centre. Homewood has developed the program for traumatic stress recovery, one of the few in-patient programs of its kind in Canada. The program for traumatic stress recovery helps patients recover from the after-effects of trauma and creates a community that helps trauma patients through the healing process.

• (1740)

We have to look after those Canadians who have helped us in so many ways by providing safety for our communities, and in the process of so doing, have stood in the way of danger themselves.

The committee also received briefs from Badge of Life Canada, the Royal Ottawa Health Centre Group, and the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, among many others. The final report affirms that the well-being of those who serve our communities is absolutely vital to the safety of all Canadians. The report makes 16 recommendations.

As the Minister of Public Safety wrote in the government's response:

The Committee's Report presents important considerations to inform the Government's approach to supporting those who have dedicated their lives to protecting our communities...

The Report will be a valuable resource as the Government moves forward with its commitment to supporting the well-being and resilience of Canada's public safety officers.

Through all this momentum and action, a clear consensus has emerged. National leadership and coordination are needed to address this issue effectively. Resilience and reintegration and the need for coordinated national research have all been identified as important themes.

There remains a broad view that a national plan must recognize that effective support demands coordinated national baseline research. An action plan must recognize the importance of collaboration in providing access to prevention, education, and training measures as well as to innovative care and effective treatment.

Finally, we have heard loud and clear that we must promote awareness for public safety officers and their families of both the

symptoms to watch for and the treatment resources available to them.

Strengthened by all of these voices over the last year, we are moving this action plan forward, helping to bring post-traumatic disorder and operational stress injuries out of the shadows and into the light. I am pleased that our discussions in this chamber make that light even brighter. Indeed, over the course of the last year, members have had more opportunity than ever before to bring this issue to the forefront.

We are making sure that we are talking to the right people, moving forward in a way that reflects the voices we have heard, and are working closely with all partners as this plan develops.

We have reflected this priority every way we can, including through the budget process, with budget 2016 reflecting the government's commitment to an action plan. However, this goes beyond commitment. It is a responsibility of the government and all of us who represent our communities that rely on the tireless and selfless contributions of the brave women and men who keep us safe. To those men and women, we give our thanks.

• (1745)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in support of Bill C-211. I thank the member for Cariboo—Prince George for bringing the bill forward. I also thank my colleague from Guelph for his thoughtful remarks.

This bill would create a federal framework for post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. That is a mental condition that can devastate an individual, impacting the individual's family, his or her ability to work, and even his or her ability to perform simple tasks.

As is the case with other mental health conditions, public awareness has often grown in the wake of extreme events, such as wars or natural disasters. Sadly, this has been our experience in Canada as we have seen men and women in the Canadian Forces returning from Afghanistan and struggling for years with the burdens of their experiences there. However, we should not think that this is simply limited to those kinds of extreme events. A soldier returning from a distant combat zone may be the first image in our minds when we talk about PTSD, but more and more, we are learning that stress, trauma, and our body's complex responses to it are issues throughout society, far from battlefields or police precincts or emergency wards.

We see it on university campuses, where students are helping expand access to mental health services and offer more support for survivors of abuse, including sexual abuse.

We see it in workplaces, where employers and workers are finding ways to reduce the stigma of mental illness and encouraging those who once suffered in silence to find the help that they need.

Nearly a decade ago, one academic study pegged the lifetime incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder across the Canadian population at nearly one in 10. In most cases, this could be linked to a single event, such as the unexpected death of a loved one, sexual assault, or witnessing a violent death or injury.

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While any Canadian can experience PTSD, certain Canadians are disproportionately likely to shoulder the burden. In particular, I am referring to front-line workers who volunteer for duties that expose them to extraordinary stress. They are police officers and firefighters. They are paramedics and prison guards. They are military personnel and others whose public service can take a great personal toll. Studies have found that members of these professions can experience PTSD at rates at least double that of the general population.

A number of provinces have moved forward on legislation to remove the barriers that Canadians in these professions may face. For instance, in my province of British Columbia, first responders who experience PTSD must prove that it is work-related in order to receive support and compensation.

Last year, in my home province, the NDP labour critic tried to amend a bill in the provincial legislature to fix that problem and make it easier for those first responders, police, firefighters, and others to get the help they need and deserve. It is absolutely shameful that the current Government of British Columbia declined to fix that problem.

Let me share just one story to illustrate why this is so important.

Lisa Jennings was a paramedic in Victoria. In the summer of 2014, Lisa suffered an assault while responding to a call. In the wake of the attack, she suffered flashbacks and suicidal thoughts. After consulting with a psychologist, she filed a claim for workers' compensation. Her claim was denied not once, not twice, but three times, because the board was able to argue that her condition was not the result of the trauma that she had experienced in that assault. In fact, because she had visited a psychologist after her parents and her brother had died in quick succession, she was labelled as having "a well-documented psychiatric history" and her claim was denied. Shameful.

Lisa fought back. With no financial support other than a small disability pension, she appealed the ruling. She even lived in her car while doing so. As Lisa said, "This is for all the first responders in B.C."

I am happy to report that three weeks ago, Lisa Jennings won her battle. An appeal tribunal reversed the earlier decisions, clearing a path for other first responders to access the support they need after suffering trauma in the line of duty.

• (1750)

A story like that should shock all Canadians and should move us in this place to act. Luckily, we have before us a proposal that would take one step forward, providing the much-needed federal leadership in this context.

What would the bill do? It would instruct the Minister of Health to convene a conference with her colleagues in National Defence and Veterans Affairs, provincial and territorial governments, and stakeholders in the medical community to develop a comprehensive federal strategy framework on post traumatic stress disorder.

This framework would help illuminate the prevalence of PTSD across Canada, as well as its social and economic costs to Canadians, by facilitating better national tracking and data collection by the

Public Health Agency of Canada. It would also seek to improve treatment by making it easier to share best practices and by establishing guidelines for diagnosis, treatment, and management of PTSD.

Last, it would broaden awareness of this condition by setting down guidelines for the creation and distribution of educational materials for public health providers across the country.

I want to raise one final issue.

Several months ago, I was contacted by Mark Farrant, a Toronto man who served as a jury foreman on a first degree murder trial. In the course of that trial, he and other jurors were exposed to graphic and disturbing visual evidence and testimony surrounding the brutal murder of a young woman. Jurors are sworn to secrecy, and the moment after the verdict is delivered, released back into their daily lives. In the wake of that experience, Mark began to experience symptoms that would later be diagnosed as PTSD. It would come to disrupt his personal life, his young family, and his successful business career.

Yet, as Mark discovered, jurors in Canada are uniquely unsupported by our justice system. There are supports for judges, court staff, and many others who are exposed to the same graphic evidence and stressful situations, but not for ordinary Canadians who are required to do their civic duty as jurors. It is time that changed. Canadians, no matter where they live, who do their civic duty and serve on a jury, ought to have the proper support services available.

To that end, I raised this issue with my colleagues on the justice committee last year and have written repeatedly to the Minister of Justice, asking that her department assess what steps it can take to address this gap. It is my hope that the justice committee will soon become the first parliamentary committee to study this problem during its upcoming review of the Criminal Code.

While, sadly, we are still waiting for any federal response, I am happy to report that as a result of Mark Farrant's tireless advocacy, and at great personal cost, his home province of Ontario just weeks ago launched a program to provide free counselling to jurors who needed it. Therefore, if Bill C-211 is referred to committee, I will be seeking to develop an amendment to ensure that the issue of juror support is considered in any federal framework on PTSD.

The bill before us today gives us a chance to stand beside Canadians like Mark Farrant in Toronto and Lisa Jennings in Victoria, who swam against the tide at personal cost to do us all a public service. In that spirit, I ask all members to support the bill.

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• (1755)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Victoria for stating his unequivocal support for this private member's bill, and my hon. colleague from Guelph who made a speech although we have yet to hear whether his party, the government, will be supporting this legislation.

First responders, firefighters, military personnel, corrections officers, police officers, front-line health care workers, like our dedicated nurses, and countless others face traumatic situations in their day-to-day work, the work they do to serve their fellow citizens and to protect our great country. While the work that these men and women do is well known, what is less known is the mental demands that these occupations require.

In these professions, men and women are regularly exposed to graphic scenes and images that anyone would find difficult and sometimes even heartbreaking to see, making them exceedingly susceptible to PTSD. As the official opposition critic for Veterans Affairs and having spent over three decades as a firefighter, I am all too familiar with the devastating effects of PTSD, and how it plays on those who wear the uniform and the negative impacts on their families.

PTSD is a condition that is characterized by persistent emotional distress occurring as a result of physical injury or severe psychological shock. It typically involves disturbances of sleep, and constant, vivid recall of the traumatic experience with dulled responses to others and to the outside world.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is characterized by the onset of psychiatric symptoms after exposure to one or more of these traumatic events. The characteristics of PTSD develop in four domains: intrusion, avoidance, alterations in cognition and mood, alterations in arousal and reactivity. People can react in many different ways. They might feel nervous, have a hard time sleeping, or go over the details of the situation in their minds. Others have more serious symptoms and their lives can be seriously disrupted.

Our society requires that these people continue to do their job, so it is the government's job to ensure that they have the ability to seek the help, should they require it.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-211 will help ensure that men and women who are suffering from PTSD are able to get the help they so desperately need. We need to develop and implement a federal framework on PTSD that provides for best practices, research, education, awareness, and treatment.

We really need people to help. Military personnel, veterans, and police officers are expected to lend a hand when the need arises. The bill calls for a federal framework "to address the challenges of recognizing the symptoms and providing timely diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder".

[*English*]

Bill C-211 is a private member's bill sponsored by the member for Cariboo—Prince George. I want to highlight and acknowledge all his hard work on this bill. Ever since we were elected to this

Parliament, I have had the pleasure and the honour of working with the member on this, and I know how extremely invested he is to ensure that our first responders, our military personnel, and our front-line health care workers are looked after.

These brave men and women do so much for our society and give back in ways that cannot be expressed in words. They give their lives to serve our country. Bill C-211 would require the Minister of Health, the Minister of National Defence, and the Minister of Veterans Affairs to consult with the provinces and territories, as well as stakeholders from the medical community and patient groups, in order to develop a comprehensive federal framework to address the challenges of identifying the symptoms and providing a timely diagnosis for the treatment of these men and women who are suffering from PTSD.

There are some statistics that I would like to share in order to highlight the high PTSD rates among Canadian first responders: 24% to 26% of corrections officers suffer from PTSD, 22% to 24% of paramedics suffer from PTSD, 16% of firefighters suffer from PTSD, 10% to 12% of police officers suffer from PTSD, and 5.3% of military personnel suffer from PTSD.

• (1800)

We cannot forget those who serve on the front lines of the medical field, including doctors and our hard-working nurses. These statistics clearly highlight that large percentages of workers in these essential professions are suffering.

I want to share the story of Natalie Harris, a paramedic from my riding, who was on the front line and the first on the scene of a brutal double homicide. Natalie, who has become a friend and an inspiration to me throughout this process of supporting the member for Cariboo—Prince George, experienced unimaginable traumatic events while working a shift as a Simcoe County paramedic.

Rather than focus on the event and the effects it had on Natalie, I want to focus on her advocacy to help others who suffer from PTSD. Natalie began her road to recovery by simply telling her story. She told her story to a lot of people. In fact, it was at an event in Barrie that we first meet. That night, I told Natalie that I would help her raise the awareness of the issue at a national level, and here we are.

Shortly after the election, the member for Cariboo—Prince George and I talked about the work that he had done to that point and his plans to introduce this bill.

For Natalie, the work continued in spite of some lapses and triggers. She continued, and continues, to speak out, continues to support others suffering from PTSD through social media and a support group she calls Wings of Change. Recently, Natalie wrote a book, to reach even more people with her story. What an inspiration.

Mental health is important to talk about. Those who suffer from PTSD need better resources.

Bill Rusk of Badge of Life Canada stated:

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...there's more of a chance of [police officers] following through [with suicide] because they have the means readily available to them, as opposed to a member of the public, who might have the same feelings, but not the means readily available.

We have a problem here, and it needs government's attention.

Mental illness, like PTSD, can strike at any time, to anyone, regardless of one's age, race, gender, occupation, or income level. It does not discriminate, and it is non-partisan.

Vince Savoia of Tema shared the sad news from his research on PTSD that roughly 60% of first responders who committed suicide in 2015 were diagnosed with PTSD. These are great tragedies.

We need to give our servicemen and servicewomen the help they need and allow them to live their lives to the fullest, rather than be burdened by their illness. People who are in these professions wake up every single day and know that, when they go to work to support our country and their fellow Canadians, their life is at risk. They perform brave tasks day in and day out and are left with the haunting images, sounds, and smells for their lifetime. Bearing witness to the tragedies and suffering that they see often becomes difficult to cope with.

Through the work of this bill, meetings with stakeholders, and the development of this framework, it is my hope that the men and women who do so much for us are able to have the services they require and know that they are not alone in this fight. We owe it to these servicemen and servicewomen, who serve us relentlessly day in and day out, to address PTSD, as it can severely impact their lives and the lives of their families.

In a larger context, mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians, whether through a family member, a friend, or a colleague, and 20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.

Our first responders, veterans, and front-line medical personnel are sick, not weak, and they need this country's help. Therefore, I ask all members in this House to support the bill that was brought forward by my friend and colleague, the member for Cariboo—Prince George.

• (1805)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity today to debate the creation of a federal framework on PTSD through Bill C-211. I would like to thank the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George for shining light on this important issue, and for his very thoughtful remarks today. It is hard to do justice to an issue of this magnitude in a little less than 10 minutes, but certainly I will do my best.

Over the course of the next few minutes, I hope to highlight the importance of the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder, nationally and in my own community; the impact it has not just on the members of our military but on emergency service workers as well, as so many have alluded to; and the impact the bill could potentially have in collaboration with some other initiatives going on in communities across Canada and within the federal government today.

Beginning with the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder in our military, I have to commend anyone who has had the opportunity to serve. So many who go do so knowing that they may not return

safely, or may not return at all. Far too many of those who do serve overseas and who are lucky enough to come home do so with physical or emotional scars that run so deep they may never be cured.

In my view, the cost of engaging our military in a mission that puts the lives of Canadians in danger includes the cost that it takes to ensure they are well. If we can afford to send our citizens to war, we can afford to take care of them when they come home, full stop.

The Canadian Forces are in a mental health crisis. The Afghanistan mission serves as a perfect example. Every member in the House knows well the turmoil that those who have served face today. Since the end of the mission, at least 71 members of the Canadian Forces have taken their own lives. By comparison, I believe the total who lost their lives in combat during the course of that mission was 138, and every one is a tragedy. The fact that we are now over the 50% loss of lives in the mission through veterans who have taken their lives by suicide is a statistic that should shock the conscience of every Canadian. We need to do something about this, and we have the capacity to do something.

This is a difficult issue for the region I represent because of some recent events that took place earlier in January in the community of Upper Big Tracadie. Just minutes away from the town that I was born in, an infantryman took his own life. When we hear members of his family speak about it, they speak about the inner demons he faced and was unable to overcome. What made the tragedy that much worse was that it was not just his life that was taken, but the lives of his family as well. His mother Brenda was killed. His wife Shanna, who recently graduated from St. Francis Xavier University, where I studied, and who worked in the hospital I was born in, as well as his 10-year-old daughter, Aaliyah, were killed as a result of this horrific incident.

This bill may not have done something for that specific incident, and it may take a long time to make a difference. The initiatives we are trying to launch at the federal level may take a very long time to make a difference, but my father always told me the best day to plant a tree is today, so we may as well take the chance while we have it.

It is not just our military. So many others are impacted by post-traumatic stress disorder. Our emergency service workers go through turmoil, which I am so lucky to not have witnessed myself. Every member of the House who has not worked as an emergency service worker can probably not understand. I have been taking meetings with police officers, firefighters, and paramedics who have explained the unimaginable horrors they live through in the course of an ordinary day. As other members alluded to, they hear the sounds they have heard, the smells they have smelled, and relive the events time and time again. It keeps them up at night and interferes with their ability to enjoy life in their full capacity as a human being. That is not right. We need to offer them the services they so desperately need to be full and well.

This issue is not without hope, although I may have painted a bit of a desperate picture. There are things we can do. I commend the effort in Bill C-211 to bring together different ministries, like the Minister of Health, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and the Minister of Defence, along with medical service providers, and, importantly, patient organizations.

●(1810)

We know the answer is not simply to put money into a program, but to make sure that any investments are made wisely to see the outcomes that are actually going to improve the quality of life for people living in our communities.

When I look at initiatives that are going on with all parties, I look at the report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I look at the multi-party committee on veterans affairs that has undertaken a study on mental health and the suicide crisis among veterans in Canada. I think this is a very positive thing.

Within a week of his being sworn in, I saw an article in *The Globe and Mail* saying that the Minister of National Defence had instructed the highest ranking members of the forces to make the suicide crisis a priority. I see investments with provincial governments like my own in Nova Scotia where dollars have been earmarked for mental health.

We can see in Canadian communities that this is a priority as well. We see organizations like TEMA that try to draw attention to the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder, but also help individuals who are trying to become well.

To those who defend our interests overseas, who keep us safe in our communities, and who respond when we are in need of emergency services, I would like to communicate that whatever I can do to ensure they have the mental health care they need to be whole and to do their jobs so my family and I can sleep safely at night, I will do what I can.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know I only have a short period of time to express something that is a very proud day for me and for the House. I have listened to speeches from across the aisle from each and every party, and I want to thank my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George, but also all members of the House who participated in this debate, because tonight we have done something very special. We have talked about this in a way that anyone watching this debate will realize that this is a non-partisan issue. This is an issue which back in 2004 when I was first elected to the House, we did not know a lot about it. I do not think I had ever heard of post-traumatic stress disorder.

I look at the effect this is having in our communities on the people we ask to protect our families and communities every single day, hourly, over and over again. This is a piece of legislation that is needed. I know my colleague said that in Canada we can do better, but tonight we realize that we will do better.

After listening to the comments from around the House, I am very proud of the system we have in this country. As I said, I have been here since 2004, and sometimes we do not get the opportunity to express our thanks and to be very proud of the people who sit in the House across the aisle, colleagues who come here who do want to

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make a difference. Tonight we are going to be making a difference with this legislation which is sorely needed.

●(1815)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Oshawa will have eight minutes remaining for his remarks when the House next returns to debate on the question.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in adjournment proceedings this evening to return to a question I originally asked on February 1. The House will recall, because we have spent today discussing the subject of electoral reform, that it was on February 1 that the Prime Minister changed the mandate letter to the hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions.

I put to the Prime Minister this question.

“Within 18 months of forming government, we will introduce legislation to enact electoral reform”. That is from the Liberal platform. It is very clear, and it was repeated with clarity in the Speech from the Throne, and the mandate to us as members of the special committee said we were replacing first past the post.

I went on to ask the Prime Minister,

If it was an essential precondition to follow on this promise that there be some sort of nationally proven majority, that there be some consensus discerned through vague surveys, why was that never mentioned in any promise or any mandate?

I was honoured that the Prime Minister stood to respond to my question personally. He replied:

anything a prime minister or a government must do must be in the interests of Canada and of all Canadians, particularly when it comes to transforming our electoral system. I understand the passion and intensity with which the member opposite believes in this, and many Canadians mirror that passion and intensity, but there is no consensus.

I could continue with the answer, but as we can see, it missed the fundamental point of my question, which was that if there was going to be a precondition, a condition precedent, before the Liberal government kept its promise, why was that never mentioned?

I contrast that with other promises in the Liberal platform, promises that I am glad were kept, frankly. There was a promise to bring in a national carbon price, and the government is on its way to doing that. It had a long process involving the various provinces. The architecture of it allows every province to have the money come back to it if it does not, in fact, put forward its own carbon pricing mechanism. It allows for cap and trade in Ontario and Quebec and a carbon tax in B.C.

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If members catch my drift, I am sure they will see that this was an election promise. There was no attempt to go back and find out if there was a broad consensus within Canada for one particular form of carbon pricing. There are many different kinds. There is cap and trade. There is a straight up carbon tax. There is carbon fee and dividend. There is a revenue-neutral carbon tax. There are adherents to all of those systems, and there are those, as we know, in the House, who do not want any carbon pricing at all. I do not know that one could say there was a clear path forward for a particular form of carbon pricing, but I am very glad the government of the day did what it promised to do in its platform and brought forward some form of carbon pricing.

I suggest that this is exactly what the Liberals should do about their promise on electoral reform. It did betray that promise by withdrawing it on February 1.

It is just a coincidence that my adjournment proceedings question came up on a day that we have been debating this promise all day long. However, I am of the view that the Liberals, in making that promise, intended to keep it. If they were to see a clear path forward, more particularly, if the Prime Minister were to see a clear path forward, through the work of all of us, many of us on that electoral reform committee, in a non-partisan fashion, as well as through the efforts of those on the Liberal backbenches who were lamenting a decision to break a promise, and who no doubt are hearing from their angry constituents, it is not too late.

In the course of this debate over the next remaining six minutes or so that we have, I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, in response, to help me, with goodwill, and setting aside partisanship, figure out how the promise can still be kept.

• (1820)

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that electoral reform, indeed all democratic reform, should be about pursuing the broadest public interest possible. We believed and we continue to believe that potential reforms must be judged by how they will help Canadians. This is why the Prime Minister said that we are not prepared to move forward with something so fundamental as reforming our electoral system without the broad support of Canadians.

Listening to Canadians is absolutely fundamental to our role as parliamentarians, and this is why the government initiated a national consultation process on electoral reform last spring. First, we asked a special all-party committee of the House of Commons to study the issue. The special committee consulted broadly with relevant experts and organizations and conducted a national engagement process that included travelling to every province and every territory and hearing from 196 experts and 567 open-mike participants, and receiving 574 written submissions and more than 22,000 responses to its e-consultation survey.

We also asked MPs to hold their own town halls to hear the views of their constituents, and MPs held 170 such town halls. The government held public meetings in every province and every territory to hear directly from Canadians, and we sought to ensure that every Canadian could have his or her view heard through an

innovative online engagement and educational tool that asked Canadians what values and what principles they wanted to see reflected in their voting system. More than 360,000 people in Canada took the time to participate and have their views heard in this important initiative, and I urge all of my fellow MPs to read the report.

As the Minister of Democratic Institutions has noted, it is clear that despite all of these important efforts to listen to Canadians, the broad consensus needed for change of this magnitude simply does not exist. The government respects and is thankful for all those Canadians who came forward and took the time to share their thoughts about our democracy and have their voices heard. When we hold public consultation we have to be ready to listen to what we hear, and we listened to what we heard.

This of course does not put an end to the important work our government is doing to strengthen our elections and build confidence in our democratic institutions, and I would like to highlight three of the government's priorities moving ahead. First, we will be continuing to move forward with Bill C-33 to make it easier for eligible voters to participate in elections as well as to improve electoral integrity. Second, the minister will be working with her colleagues, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to help protect our voting system from the threat of hacking. Third, notwithstanding that Canada already has one of the best-regulated political finance regimes in the world, we will take steps to make fundraising even more open and even more transparent.

These are only a few of the items in the mandate letter of the Minister of Democratic Institutions. Our hard-working colleagues on the procedure and House affairs committee are also doing important work to review the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations for improving the electoral process.

Clearly, there is still much work to do to further enhance our electoral process, and I look forward to supporting these efforts to reinforce Canada's strong democratic foundations.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. friend and colleague, the parliamentary secretary, that if the government engages in a consultation it should listen to what it heard. What it heard was overwhelming support for proportional representation from more than 80% of the witnesses who testified before the committee and members of the public in the tens of thousands who answered surveys online that our committee put forward.

Bear in mind the mandate of our committee was not to hold a consultation and tell the government there was a consensus, because the promise had been made. The promise was that we were getting rid of first past the post. The committee was asked, "What do you recommend instead?" We also listened to Canadians, and we listened to them by the tens of thousands. Even the MyDemocracy.ca survey overwhelmingly reflected values consistent with proportional representation and not with our current broken, archaic, and perverse first past the post.

It is not too late for the Liberal government to listen to Canadians. Those with an opinion overwhelmingly want to have fair voting.

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• (1825)

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Mr. Speaker, the platform included many elements of electoral reform, and it certainly also included engaging with Canadians to make such important decisions. Engaging as many Canadians as possible in the conversation around electoral reform is something that we have taken very seriously, as I have just enumerated.

It was what Canadians expected us to do before embarking on fundamental change to our democracy. Listening to Canadians is also something that the government is committed to doing across a range of files and issues. As our government has indicated on numerous occasions, any major change to the way we cast our vote would require the broad support of Canadians.

The government remains committed to strengthening and protecting our democratic institutions. We are moving to accomplish that goal.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address a situation I asked a question about in the House much earlier this year. It is about the bovine TB that is occurring in southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan.

This very serious situation has created unending stress and harm in the cattle industry. These are generational families on generational ranches that have raised some of the best beef in the world, generational herds. These are not herds that have just popped up, but have been there hereditarily and were developed decade after decade.

When one animal is identified with bovine TB, immediately CFIA becomes involved, as its goal is to keep Canada TB free so we have that reputation in the international market of trading the best beef in the world. However, we have large ranches with community pastures and many animals from many different ranches use them. When 18 different family businesses became quarantined, this meant a lot of stress on their neighbours as testing would have to occur. As the testing occurred, there were reactors, which meant there were orders for slaughtering.

Over the last three months, these families were stressed as they no longer had an asset they could take to market. These products are not like others. These are live animals. These are generational herds that are produced to sell, but the families could not sell them and they could not do anything with them other than wait for a slaughter order. They had to maintain the herds, feed them and they had to take care of what would be slaughtered. The stress was incredible. It was a part of the founding industry, beef ranching industry in that part of the world.

Eventually thousands of bulls, cows and calves were slaughtered. It left these family businesses in a very rough place.

CFIA had limited resources on the ground to work with this, not realizing the size of this catastrophe for these families. Over time, more staff was allocated to work with the testing. Thousands of animals had to be tested. As they worked through this, local ranchers developed better relationships with these people, but there were problems as these animals were destroyed and because of an

arranged payment. However, there is only a one-year tax deferral, and these herds cannot be replaced. We cannot go to Walmart and get a new herd.

The families need five years of tax deferrals to start the process of rebuilding herds with the kind of quality for which they have the reputation. As we rebuild this industry in this part of our country and as we rebuild the best beef in the world, we need a simple change. It is not a change of legislation. A simple change can be made because the supplementary program to support these was a unique one put in place for this. The Finance Department can make a simple change so these farms will survive and get back in the business in a productive manner.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to talk about the measures the government is taking to help cattle ranchers in Alberta.

At the end of September 2016, we were notified that a Canadian cow tested positive for bovine tuberculosis when it was slaughtered in the United States. The cow was from Alberta.

In Canada, bovine TB is a reportable disease and subject to a national mandatory eradication program that has been in place since 1923. It is thought to be officially eradicated in Canada today, but isolated cases can still crop up.

The government knows that bovine TB is a great hardship for the affected ranchers. We understand the challenges the ranchers might face if their facilities and herds are placed in quarantine.

We are taking the necessary measures to ensure that the disease is contained and to help the affected ranchers. We will continue to work in close collaboration with the provincial governments and producer groups to address their immediate needs.

Whenever a reportable disease is suspected or confirmed, the objective is to minimize the impact on our producers while respecting Canada's domestic and international obligations to take adequate and precautionary control measures. These measures are essential to protecting the health of Canadian livestock.

As a control measure, the movement of all animals affected is restricted. We then proceed with animal testing, humane slaughter, and carcass disposal if necessary.

Every investigation and intervention is different, but an investigation usually consists of the following steps: facilities are placed in quarantine; an investigation is conducted; infected animals are slaughtered and carcasses disposed of; affected facilities are cleaned and disinfected; and finally, producers receive compensation for animals slaughtered.

Adjournment Proceedings

The current investigation involves a considerable number of herds. We have to retrace the movement of the animals over the past five years and conduct analyses, which is why we expect the investigation to take several months.

CFIA has completed the slaughter of all adult animals in the infected herd. Furthermore, animals in the infected herd were sent to the slaughterhouse where they underwent a post-mortem to ascertain the absence of lesions consistent with bovine tuberculosis.

Animals sent for slaughter are inspected before and after they are slaughtered, for that is how we ensure that all animals that enter the food chain are free of diseases such as bovine tuberculosis. Post-mortems are always done in federal and provincial institutions, even when no investigations for bovine tuberculosis are under way.

We understand the financial pressures that can be associated with an animal disease outbreak for producers, and we are trying to alleviate this burden. The CFIA will issue a compensation payment for any animal that must be slaughtered because of bovine tuberculosis. In mid-December 2016, the CFIA began issuing payments, and as of February 8, nearly \$16 million had been paid in compensation.

The CFIA is also working as fast as possible to lift quarantines as soon as the absence of bovine tuberculosis is confirmed in facilities.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the information that my colleague has shared with us. It enlightens how complicated this issue is, how stressful and challenging not only for the CFIA, for our reputation, but also for the ranchers themselves.

As the parliamentary secretary mentioned, this is ongoing. We have another year or two in this process. It is not done now with slaughtering. It will take another year or two ongoing.

Another issue has developed around this. There are thousands of elk, a few hundred put on the base that surrounds this community pasture. They were brought in clean 20 years ago. There are no predators. They are now in the thousands as of a couple of weeks ago. Chronic wasting disease was diagnosed by CFIA for the first time. This is also a threat to our cattle industry. That needs to be dealt with as these animals have come off the base and have mixed with the cattle herds. They are destroying pastures and fences, and other situations are occurring. That needs to be taken care of as well.

Hopefully, CFIA will move on that, as well as continue with the efforts to deal with bovine TB in this area.

• (1835)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, the government and I, as a former rancher, understand how trying such a situation can be for the ranchers.

CFIA will compensate producers for any animal ordered destroyed because of bovine tuberculosis. CFIA will continue to make compensation payments quickly as slaughter operations proceed.

On November 30, 2016, the government announced that producers facing extraordinary costs due to bovine tuberculosis will

be eligible for financial assistance under the AgriRecovery Framework. As of February 3, \$3.1 million had been paid out.

The 2016 Bovine Tuberculosis Assistance Initiative will provide assistance to producers to cover the extraordinary costs they are facing as a result of the quarantine measures. This includes feeding and water infrastructure, feed for the animals, transportation, cleaning and disinfecting as well as interest costs on loans granted in such circumstances.

CFIA is working as quickly as possible to ensure that the quarantine can be lifted as soon as the absence of bovine TB in the facilities is confirmed.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my original question was precipitated by a visit to my office by local mayors from my riding. They were concerned that the Columbia River Treaty needed to be renegotiated, that their communities and many others in the region have spent a great deal of effort consulting with affected and interested parties about this critical issue, and that the federal government remains silent on the status of negotiations.

The original treaty was enacted in 1964 and has had a huge impact on southeastern British Columbia, with 600 square kilometres flooded, over 3,000 properties expropriated, and 1,380 people were forced to move. First nations' rights and title were completely ignored. Wildlife habitat was devastated.

On the positive side, the treaty has provided electric power for many parts of B.C., and the north and western United States. The Canadian entitlement has been a financial benefit to the B.C. government.

The treaty is set to expire in 2024, and we are in a period where renegotiation should be taking place. Some of the important issues are, of course, indigenous rights, which were completely ignored before, and continued compensation for Canadian services and impacts. My constituents continue to be impacted by the dams and reservoirs created by this treaty.

Americans will want more services and water, and will ask for a reduction in compensation. They will want more water for domestic, industrial, and agricultural purposes. Constituents in the Okanagan are concerned that the American orchard industry has gone up 100 times since the original treaty, because of the irrigation.

Adjournment Proceedings

The future of flood control in both countries is up to question. This includes ecosystem values, including the possible reintroduction of salmon into the upper Columbia River; and improved coordination of water levels in the Kooacanusa reservoir and the Arrow Lakes. People in Nakusp feel like they are living next to a bathtub, the water goes up and down so much. They want stable water, and full-pool levels in the summer when they need it for tourism and recreation.

We want to know where the talks stand between Canada and the U.S. on this critical subject. The previous American administration said on October 7 that it was ready to start talks with Canada. However, since December 2, when I first rose on this question, much has changed in the political landscape of the United States.

The new foreign affairs minister met with Secretary of State Tillerson this week, and now we hear that the Prime Minister will be visiting Washington next Monday. I would hope that he will raise this issue. It is one of the agreements that is of mutual benefit for both Canada and the United States.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and teammate with FC Commoners for raising this issue and giving me a chance to reply.

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

As a resident of the greater drainage basin, my colleague understands why the Columbia River Treaty is important to the region.

The Columbia River Treaty between Canada and the United States is a 1964 agreement that regulates electricity cost and production.

[*English*]

The objective of this treaty was the creation of benefits that are to be shared equitably between Canada and the United States, and this remains the goal.

Based on the geography of the basin, it made sense to build three dams and reservoirs on the Canadian side that would provide flood protection and increase hydro power generation in the United States. In exchange for this benefit to the U.S., British Columbia received a one-time payment of \$64 million for flood protection for 60 years.

The province also receives one-half of the incremental electrical power generated at U.S. hydro power facilities from the managed flows of water from Canada, which currently sits at around \$100 million to \$200 million per year.

In its more than 50 years, the treaty has protected our neighbours and helped provide hydroelectricity for basin residents on both sides of the border.

I should also add that, due to water storage and the managed flows, other benefits have also ensued. These include flexibility to allow for stable water levels for irrigation, navigation, and recreation. This amounts to benefits beyond those explicitly covered by the current treaty.

Now we are at a crossroads in the life of the Columbia River Treaty. A provision in the treaty allows either Canada or the United

States to terminate it after 60 years, which as my hon. colleague mentioned, would be in 2024. Both countries have conducted reviews to determine what its future should be.

On the Canadian side, British Columbia, which through the 1963 agreement with Canada holds most of the obligations and benefits of the Columbia River Treaty, has led the review.

The United States recently completed its review and has indicated a desire to begin negotiations on the treaty's future. To begin negotiations, we need first to develop our negotiating mandate.

Until then, we continue to pursue informal discussions with our U.S. counterparts and intensify our side-by-side engagement with the province, first nations, and local Canadian communities.

Let me reassure the member opposite that we are working and will continue to work closely with those local communities, first nations, and the Government of British Columbia on the future of this treaty.

[*Translation*]

I would like to add that, when the treaty was first negotiated 60 years ago, the affected first nations were not consulted. Because of the treaty and activities involving the Columbia River in the decades preceding the Columbia River Treaty, first nations and residents of the drainage basin witnessed the loss of very valuable land and cultural sites and the demise of the salmon migration.

The repercussions are still making themselves felt in the form of dust storms and the loss of beaches and recreational opportunities. We cannot go back in time and change what happened, but this time, we will negotiate a new Columbia River treaty with the active participation of first nations and drainage basin residents.

[*English*]

I thank my hon. colleague for re-raising this issue.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, with all the talk of tariffs against softwood lumber, border taxes, and potential trade wars with the United States, I would just hope that the government would take this issue as an important opportunity to build some goodwill and commence renegotiation of this treaty with the new U.S. administration. It is a win-win for both sides.

The current situation brings a lot of uncertainty. I understand that our government cannot do much about the uncertainty created by our friends south of the border, but it can control the uncertainty that it has created by being so quiet on this issue in Canada.

It has been months since the United States first made its intentions known, even if they might have changed somewhat now. We have had silence from the Liberal government. Right now my region needs reassurance from the government that it is serious about renegotiating the Columbia River Treaty and listening to the interests and concerns that have been registered by local consultations.

• (1845)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a few more points as they relate to the Columbia River Treaty.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*Translation*]

The governments of Canada and British Columbia worked very closely on the treaty. For Canada and British Columbia, the objective of renewing the Columbia River Treaty is to ensure that the benefits of the treaty are shared equally by Canadians and Americans.

Although British Columbia has derived some financial benefits from the treaty, it has also experienced significant negative impacts. Productive land was flooded, first nations sites of cultural significance were flooded and, every year, residents of the basin are affected by significant changes in water levels of the reservoir.

[*English*]

Our officials have met with representatives from basin first nations and have committed to work closely with them as we move toward negotiations with the United States.

Again, the objective of this treaty was the creation of benefits that are to be shared equitably between Canada and the United States and that remains the goal.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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