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(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 30, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 30, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

BILL C-352—CANADA SHIPPING ACT, 2001

VOTE ON THE DESIGNATION OF AN ITEM

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House of the results of the secret ballot vote held over the last two sitting days.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 92(4), I declare the motion in relation to the designation of Bill C-352, an act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to provide for the development of a national strategy (abandonment of vessels), negatived. Accordingly, Bill C-352 is declared non-votable.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

ETHICS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on November 22, 2017, by the member for Montcalm regarding the participation of the Minister of Finance in the vote on Motion No. 42. In raising this matter, the member for Montcalm reiterated the arguments raised by the member for Joliette on November 8, 2017, contending that the Minister of Finance was in contravention of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons by participating in a vote on Motion No. 42 relating to tax avoidance. He also argued that the minister had attempted, through his parliamentary secretary, to influence the House in the furtherance of his private interest.

[*English*]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Second Edition, page 568, states:

No Member is entitled to take part in debate or to vote on any question in which he or she has a private interest (formerly referred to as a "direct pecuniary interest"), and any vote subsequently determined to have been cast in these circumstances would be disallowed....

If a Member's vote is questioned after the fact, it is the practice to accept his or her word. If the House wishes to pursue the issue, notice must first be given of a substantive motion to disallow a Member's vote.

[*Translation*]

In addition, section 13 of the Conflict of Interest Code, which was established to guide members in the ethical discharge of their duties, including when there are private interests, states, and I quote:

A Member shall not participate in debate on or vote on a question in which he or she has a private interest.

[*English*]

Based on the restriction provided in the code, it is clear that the right of members to debate and vote is not absolute. Furthermore, Speaker Milliken, on October 6, 2005, stated, at page 8473 of the *Debates*:

...the Conflict of Interest Code contains rules that the House has adopted for itself and that the House has mandated the Ethics Commissioner to interpret and apply the code.

[*Translation*]

It is the commissioner who has the sole authority to apply the dispositions of the code and to investigate any alleged conflicts of interest. It should be noted, however, that members do have the ability to refer matters to the commissioner. Section 27 of the code establishes the process relating to concerns about a potential conflict of interest involving another member. The House too can direct the commissioner to conduct an inquiry by way of a resolution. Section 28 then outlines how the House may proceed if the commissioner concludes that a member has not complied with an obligation under the code.

[*English*]

It is not the role of the Chair to determine if a conflict of interest exists, but instead, to ensure that the rights and privileges of members of this House are always safeguarded. By extension, as Speaker, I cannot unilaterally deprive a member of the right to vote any more than I can unilaterally order that a vote be redone.

[*Translation*]

As members will surely appreciate, the seriousness of a charge against a member is such that the Chair must make absolutely certain that the procedures that the House has adopted are strictly followed. I would like to thank all members for their attention in this matter.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[Translation]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 10.5 of the Lobbying Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report on investigation from the Commissioner of Lobbying.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to eight petitions.

* * *

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination, with biographical notes, for the proposed appointment of position of Raymond Th  berge as Commissioner of Official Languages. I request that the nomination and biographical notes be referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Secondly, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination, with biographical notes, for the proposed appointment of Nancy B  langer as Commissioner of Lobbying. I request that the nomination and biographical notes be referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled:

- (1010)

[English]

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, adopted in New York, December 13, 2006, and an explanatory memorandum is included with this treaty.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present in both official languages the seventh report of the Standing Committee on National Defence in relation to Supplementary Estimates (B), 2017-18.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since Confederation, the demographics of the House have not necessarily perfectly represented the demographics of Canada. There are many families in Canada that have babies or young children, so their style of life is different. If that is not acknowledged and made easy to deal with, they may not have equal representation in the House.

I am very pleased today to present a report that tries to remove some of those barriers.

[Translation]

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 48th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, entitled "Services and Facilities Provided to Members of Parliament with Young Children". Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

[English]

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to Bill C-323, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (rehabilitation of historic property).

The committee has studied the bill and recommends not to proceed further with this bill.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, entitled, Supplementary Estimates (B) 2017-18, Vote 1b under the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying, and Vote 1b under the Offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada.

* * *

INDIAN ACT

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, you would find that there is unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, when no Member rises to speak on the motion relating to Senate amendments to Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act (elimination of sex-based inequities in registration), or at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders this day, whichever comes first, every question necessary to dispose of the said stage of the said Bill shall be deemed put, and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, December 4, 2017 at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary 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.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC) Mr. Speaker, I move that the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, presented to the House on Friday, June 16, 2017, be concurred in.

Earlier this year, something remarkable happened at the immigration committee. We tabled a unanimous report and for those watching who might not understand what that means, it meant that all parties in attendance agreed to the form and substance of a report that was tabled in the House. To me that is really remarkable. It shows that an in-depth study took place and there was general consensus on the need for change and general consensus on the way that the change should proceed.

The title of the report is “Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants”. By moving this concurrence motion today, what I hope to achieve is that all members in this place will rise and support the content and the recommendations in this report as the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration also had consensus on this. Why is this important? Why are we raising this today? Because it is an issue that affects all members of Parliament in terms of the work that our offices complete. One of the main scopes of work that all of our offices provide in terms of support for our constituents is casework with regard to immigration. One of the things that we all see in our offices is constituents who have had significant impact from the results of bad advice from immigration consultants.

Before I start my speech on this, I want to emphasize something that members of all political parties wanted to convey in the study. There are people who do great work in this regard, but during the study, we heard overwhelming amounts of testimony that the way that this practice is regulated in Canada is not working.

This morning in debate, I want to give colleagues who were not on the immigration and citizenship committee a little background on what the study entailed and what the recommendations were in the hopes that they will support this and, for IRCC officials who are watching this morning, an understanding that my party generally supports the direction of the report. My party hopes that the government moves quickly on it and that colleagues in the government party who are not part of the government will also ask the government to move on the recommendations in the report. I and all other members of the citizenship and immigration committee, subsequent to the tabling of this report and the government's response, have had stakeholders talk to us and ask when the government is going to move on this, that there is a lack of clarity right now given that the committee tabled the unanimous report. I hope that by concurring in this report, we can agree with the findings of the committee, at least in general principle, and hopefully what we hear in debate this morning is the government committing to act quickly on implementing some of the recommendations.

In March 2017, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration commenced a study on immigration consultants. This

study lasted from March to June, where the committee heard from 50 witnesses, so there were many witnesses who testified at committee, and received 24 written briefs. The final report of the committee was adopted by the committee on June 14, 2017, so we are already well over the six-month mark here.

The final report of the committee was adopted and presented in the House in the following days. This report entitled, “Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants” was unanimous and did not have a dissenting opinion from the Conservative or NDP members. This final report was an instance of cross-party collaboration in an attempt to find a real solution to negligent, fraudulent, and ghost consultants who are taking advantage of already vulnerable clients.

During our committee meetings, we heard from countless witnesses that while any prospective immigrant or temporary resident may seek the services of immigration and citizenship consultants and paralegals, certain immigrants are at greater risk of exploitation by unscrupulous consultants. In particular, witnesses highlighted the vulnerability of those with “precarious immigration status”, a term encompassing all forms of temporary immigration status, noting that these individuals are more likely to pay thousands of dollars to consultants for false promises of permanent residency. Witnesses drew the committee's attention to abuse and exploitation involving live-in caregivers, international students, and temporary foreign workers.

• (1015)

In her testimony, Maria Esel Panlaqui from the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office in Toronto said the following:

[Live-in caregivers]...are easily taken advantage of by some immigration consultants, whether authorized or not authorized. Most often these workers say they can't discern whether consultants are authorized or not.

In some instances, even though they don't trust them entirely, they still end up working with them because they don't know where else to get help. Most of our clients claim that they have been manipulated and intimidated by their immigration consultants.

Another witness gave specific examples of exploitation experienced by international students. He stated that consultants have been known to ask for \$15,000 to \$20,000 to help international students find employment, remain, and gain permanent residency in Canada.

We also heard from Natalie Drolet of the West Coast Domestic Workers' Association, who drew attention to the vulnerability of temporary foreign workers, or TFWs. According to Ms. Drolet, temporary foreign workers have little choice but to hire third-party employment agents to get connected with an employer in Canada. She stated:

These agents are more often than not working in a dual role as immigration consultants and employment agents. We see immigration consultants typically charging temporary foreign workers anywhere from \$4,000 to \$16,000 for low-wage jobs in Canada. Recently, an IRCC officer in Vancouver told me that he had a case of a temporary foreign worker who paid \$40,000.

Temporary foreign workers are willing to pay these fees because they are counselled by immigration consultants that they would have a pathway to permanent residence in Canada, which is often not the case.

Routine Proceedings

The committee heard of a number of examples of misconduct and fraud, including forging signatures, charging exorbitant fees for some services often not rendered, and misleading clients who lost everything they had when they arrived in Canada. In short, without proper regulation and oversight, unscrupulous consultants can ruin lives.

The first issue is the lack of regulation, but the second is why do so many prospective Canadians feel they need to hire representatives? The fact that many newcomers to Canada feel they have no option but to pay thousands of dollars to access our immigration system should be a major concern. Why is our bureaucracy so complicated that the people it is set up to help cannot navigate it? Why are the majority of immigration applications not digitized? Why is correspondence not written in plain language so that people without a legal background can understand it? Why is it so difficult for people to receive accurate and detailed updates on the status of their immigration applications without the involvement of third parties? Again, these are questions all of us in this place wrestle with as we try to support people who come into our offices with immigration case work. Indeed, these are questions that consecutive governments have wrestled with over the course of decades.

With regard to the governance of immigration consultants and paralegals, there are two types of representatives: paid authorized representatives and unpaid representatives. Authorized paid representatives include lawyers and paralegals who are members in good standing of a Canadian, provincial, or territorial law society. They could also be notaries who are members in good standing of the *Chambre des notaires du Québec*. Authorized paid representatives could also be citizenship or immigration consultants who are members in good standing with the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council, the ICCRC, the current regulatory body. Unpaid representatives can be family members, friends, and other third parties such as church organizations.

Under the former Conservative government, changes were made through Bill C-35, the *Cracking Down on Crooked Consultants Act*, to designate ICCRC as the new regulator of immigration consultants. These changes were made to ensure the integrity of and confidence in our immigration system and to combat the rise in crooked and ghost consultants who had been taking advantage of newcomers to Canada.

While some positive changes were made, the misuse and abuse of new Canadians has persisted since the designation of ICCRC as the regulatory body. This is one of the reasons why the Conservatives support this report. While we recognize that attempts were made to create a regulatory body for this particular group of service providers, the reality is that there is overwhelming evidence showing that people are still being taken advantage of. This needs to change.

One of the major issues with the regulatory framework has been the issue of shared jurisdiction over fraudulent and ghost consultants. The RCMP and CBSA are both responsible for investigating authorized consultants who engage in fraud, and ghost consultants who operate outside the law governing immigration representatives. However, further resources are needed for these units to adequately address the issue of fraudulent consultants. Additionally, it should be noted that the ICCRC does not have any oversight over unregulated

representatives. Instead, its authority lies in investigating misconduct and potential abuses by its members, who are regulated consultants.

● (1020)

I will now turn to the issues with the current governance of immigration consultants. As explained at committee, the ICCRC is a self-governing not-for-profit organization that has an arm's-length relationship with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The issues with the current system include the following: serious gaps in the disciplinary process of the ICCRC for the complaints it receives; lack of stringency in the ICCRC's admissions standards into it as a regulatory body; lack of a clear mechanism to adequately dispute fees; an inadequate governance structure; lack of transparency and accountability in the functioning of this regulatory body; fear on the part of new Canadians to lodge a complaint due to their lack of understanding of our immigration systems and fear of being denied status; the inadequacy of the current regulatory framework in overseeing the actions of regulated consultants; the inadequate pursuit and prosecution of ghost consultants, who are unregulated representatives, for their nefarious activities; and outside factors, including a lack of adequate client services, which contribute to the demand for immigration consultants and paralegals.

To address these problems, our committee unanimously issued 21 recommendations. The common theme in the committee's findings is that more needs to be done to combat fraudulent and ghost consultants. The recommendations are outlined in the report and contain many common-sense initiatives that should allow the government to provide an updated framework that, once and for, would begin to address some of the concerns contained therein.

I could spend the rest of my time going through all of the recommendations, and I might touch on a few of them, but there are a few themes I want to put forward.

One of the things that bothers me, and I am sure bothers my colleagues in the government party also, is the the lack of knowledge of the newcomers to Canada who are trying to access the immigration system. For example, I was in Toronto a few weeks ago and met with a few live-in caregivers. What alarmed me was that they did not understand that they could set up something as basic as a MyCIC account. It is an online account that allows people to look at the status of their immigration applications without having to pay a consultant or lawyer to do that. Oftentimes, people come into our office who simply do not understand how to fill out basic forms.

Routine Proceedings

To me, this report really deals with two dimensions of the problems at hand. The first is that our system does not translate well to people who are trying to use it. There is a usability component that I feel the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, the government, needs to implement. We have been looking at this for years. However, we really need to make a very concerted effort to look at end-users and ensure that the system is easy for them to navigate, while maintaining the integrity and security of our immigration system. The government would be doing its job well if it could show not only the integrity of the processing and security of the immigration system, but also that the people who are trying to access it are not having to pay tens of thousands of dollars, or feel like they have to pay tens of thousands of dollars, to an immigration consultant to do something as basic as fill out a form. That is why some of the recommendations in here talk about service delivery and improving that within the department.

The government would also do very well if it could say what specific steps it is taking to combat these service delivery issues. Oftentimes, when I am at committee, and I am sure government members would share my frustration, we get departmental officials sitting in front of us basically giving the line, "Don't worry, we're on it." The reality is that ICCRC is one of the most siloed and difficult-to-penetrate bureaucracies in government. I know there are many people doing a lot of good work in the department, but sometimes when listening to the departmental testimony, I feel there is more concern about preserving silos than thinking about new ways of delivering service to ensure that we are protecting the most vulnerable. I do not understand why there is this whole industry to fill out forms. To me, that is a failure of government. A lot of the recommendations in this report deal with that.

The other dimension of the recommendations deals with the fact that some of these consultants are providing what amounts to legal advice. Some of the cases I see in my office, and I hope some of my colleagues will agree with me, are the worst cases, and sometimes, as members of Parliament, there is really nothing we can do because people have been given bad legal advice by someone who is not a lawyer but a consultant. I am looking around the room. How many times have members had people walk into their offices and say that someone told them to lie on their citizenship application and that their application had been rejected because they were told to omit information? This is the sort of thing the report is designed to push the government to correct.

● (1025)

In good faith and to show that I am really trying to make this a non-partisan debate, especially to the government House leader, who I am sure will speak on this at some point, our government did attempt to fix this with the implementation of the regulatory body the ICCRC. However, as immigration critic, after listening to the testimony at committee, I have to say that we need to do more. This is a problem that has plagued Canada's governments of all political stripes, and to me this is a real opportunity for the government not only to show Canadians that it is serious about ensuring the integrity of our immigration system, but also about ensuring the world's most vulnerable, and the people who are trying to access our country, are not taken advantage of.

We heard stories at committee, some of them in camera because people were worried about their identity being leaked, or out of shame. These are people who do not have a lot of resources. They were bilked out of tens of thousands of dollars and basically left stranded in Canada. That should not happen.

The recommendations in the report are a road map to the action that I hope will eventually correct this. The way the immigration system consultants are governed right now is just not working, and needs to change. I really hope all of my colleagues will vote to concur in the report.

One of the reasons we are bringing this up today is the sheer number of reports of ghost consultants or others being prosecuted. I get a media notification at least once every couple of weeks about them. Yesterday, in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, there was a story about an unlicensed immigration consultant who collected \$91,000 while having no licence whatsoever. We know that the number of unreported cases outweigh the ones reported in the media. That is part of the problem right now. The people who feel like they have been scammed really do not have recourse or an effective and transparent system to seek justice. Part of the issue is that we have difficulty as Canadians expressing to people overseas who is and who is not able to provide services.

The other thing I want to note to my colleagues opposite is that I had numerous groups in my office after the report was tabled asking when the government was going to do something about this, and what it was going to do. Law societies, the practice itself, especially the people who are operating in good faith, will need time to adapt to any changes made. I would like to see the government, prior to going into Christmas break, give some sort of indication to law societies, immigration consultants, and certainly to our offices that do a lot of casework, what those changes might be, or if it is in fact going to pursue changes.

I read the government's response to the report. There was some acknowledgement that the content of the report and study was valid, but what the government needs to do is to provide a bit more information about how and when it will implement changes, even if just to provide a little more clarity on how these will roll out, prior to our going into what will essentially be a six to eight-week break from debate in this place.

That is my rationale. I really hope all members will support this. The report was well done. It is an example for Canadians of committees and Parliament doing something that resembles work. At the end of the day, I hope the outcome is better policy for people who are accessing our immigration system.

I also want to congratulate and thank my colleagues. I thank the former chair of the immigration committee, as well as my colleagues of all political stripes for putting forward a really smart report. In the interests of everyone who will be affected by these changes in a very positive way, I sincerely ask my colleagues to support this.

Routine Proceedings

• (1030)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our colleague from Calgary Nose Hill for all her tremendous work on this study. I would also like to thank all the members who I had the pleasure of working with as chair of the committee.

The member referenced some of the difficult witness testimony to which we had to listen. We heard about the outrageous amount of money consultants took from some of the most vulnerable among us. We heard stories from people from other parts of the world who started to integrate into Canadian society only to have their dreams of becoming Canadian dashed.

We heard in-camera testimony that most Canadians would not hear. Without revealing who those individuals were, we heard about two categories. We heard of male labourers being terribly abused in situations that the consultants had put them in and we heard about vulnerable young women.

Would the member tell us a bit more about that human cost?

• (1035)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my colleague mentioned the human cost because it is difficult to quantify.

The report recommends looking at issues like how services are financed, the resourcing requirements. One of the recommendations looks at potentially resourcing newcomer service agencies to help provide basic service with respect to filling out forms, so that exploitation does not occur.

It is a rare day in the House of Commons when Conservatives agree that we need to look at perhaps increasing resources on this. We just need to think of the cost of 338 members of Parliament employing someone in their offices just to do immigration case work, or the amount of resources required within ICCRC to look at poor applications, or the cost of the deportation of people who have been given bad advice, and it goes on. A cost is associated with this.

Maybe we are not attracting the best and the brightest through our economic streams because these recommendations are not in place. The government needs to provide a plan on how it will influence some of these recommendations. To my colleague's point, we need to talk about how that affects the human cost of people who try to access our system.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over 50% of my constituents are new Canadians. We have seen a deterioration in the immigration system over the last few years. She may disagree with me on what happened under the former Conservative regime, but I think she would agree that over the last two years, because some of the changes that have been poorly communicated and are often contradictory, it is even worse now for new Canadians than it would have been a couple of years ago.

As a result of that, a lot of new Canadians, those who are desperate, go to immigration consultants. Many immigration consultants are extremely professional. They bend over backward, and they work extremely hard for their clients. Others, unfortunately, because of the lack of regulation, take advantage of new Canadians who simply are desperate for an immigration system that functions for them.

Given these circumstances and given the deterioration in the degree of service being given to new Canadians, how urgent is it for the government to act, so we can have in place an immigration system that works for everybody in the country and have the proper regulation around immigration consultants?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, that is a great Canadian question. When we think about other immigration debates happening in other parliaments around the world, the debate is “if” not “how”. The fact that we are talking about how and not if is a very positive Canadian issue.

My colleague makes a very good point. If we get the “how” wrong, we lose the social licence to operate the immigration system and some of the world's most vulnerable often end up falling through the cracks.

I agree with his assertion that we cannot look at how we deliver immigration as a static thing. Circumstances change and the government needs to be on top of that. Again, I really do not want this to be an indictment of the government today. There is time for that. For example, when the government said that it would bring in 25,000 Syrian refugees, that had resource implications on other functions of the IRCC.

Going forward, it is how people may access resources like their MyCIC account. I spoke about digitization of some of the application process, better, more effective, and transparent information directly from the government, for someone trying to access the system. Those are non-partisan process issues. The debate on immigration in Canada is about process, how we ensure the integrity of the system and protect people.

This report is a good attempt at getting the “how” right. I hope all colleagues will support it.

• (1040)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly see the kinds of issues my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill talked about in my constituency office. The member has a lot of experience, having been in government and having implemented things. The report contains 21 recommendations. Does she have a sense of what is a reasonable timeline to achieve all of them?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, today I am asking the government to provide a timeline of implementation, as well as to concur in the report.

People in the community see that the government has tabled its response to this report. A lot is going on with the immigration file, but the government has gone silent on what will be implemented and when.

Routine Proceedings

I would rather comment on what the government thinks is an appropriate timeline. I would ask it to speak to this a little more clearly, even if it is in one-on-one conversations with members of the Law Society, or the immigration consultant community, or individual members of Parliament. We need to have more clarity on whether it plans to undertake any of the recommendations in this report and the timeline to do that. I would rather respond to what the government thinks is appropriate, and we can debate that. However, first it needs to say what it thinks is reasonable.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, quite often a report, even a unanimous one by a standing committee in this place, can go by without a chance for us to discuss and debate it in the House.

I re-emphasize and agree entirely that the immigration consultant industry is long overdue for regulation. Within my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands and in my little riding office, we spend at least 80% of our time on immigration and refugee cases. The ones that come to us, after an immigration consultant has “helped” the applicant, are the hardest to unravel, with the the multiple mistakes that have been made. As other hon. members have said, this often has a grievous impact on the lives of peoples and their hopes and dreams of coming to Canada.

I thank the hon. member for bringing this report to us today so we can put additional pressure on the government to tell us what it will do with the report. The need is urgent.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has brought out this theme. I think if anybody stood in this place, it would be the same, that he or she has a full-time staff member just doing immigration case work. Maybe we could do things a little better.

I want to re-emphasize a couple of points. I know that my former colleague Jason Kenney looked at the immigration consultants' issue. They wanted to try self-governance and self-regulation. I stand here as a Conservative. After hearing testimony, I am glad we tried, but it still does not work.

Today, I want to ask IRCC officials who might be listening to this to support the recommendations in this report, at least generally, in concept and in principle. Then also give us some sense of a timeline and how implementation will occur, prior to the Christmas break, so we can communicate that to stakeholder groups before February or March so this period of uncertainty does not continue for months.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this important debate on the report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled “Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants”. I want to thank the committee for its valuable and thoughtful report. Also, thank you to the many witnesses who took the time to appear before the committee to provide their insights.

I want to assure the members of this House that the government takes very seriously the protection of the public from cases of unprofessional or unethical practices. The government will conduct a

comprehensive review of the issues raised and address any concerns appropriately. The government also agrees that it is necessary to deter those who would work as consultants while unauthorized. There is a strong need to ensure that practitioners operate in a professional and ethical manner, that public confidence and program integrity are maintained, and that the interests of newcomers and applicants who wish to retain the services of consultants are protected.

In its report, the committee provided a series of recommendations that call for fundamental changes in three main areas: the legislative framework for the body responsible for governing immigration and citizenship consultants; investigations and enforcement concerning the offence of practising while not authorized and other offences; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, or IRCC, procedures for processing applications and for communicating with clients and with prospective applicants.

These are complex issues that have an impact on public confidence, clients, and authorized immigration and citizenship consultants. Because of this complexity and the inter-dependence of the issues at hand, the government will take the necessary time to carefully consider the committee's report. IRCC will undertake a thorough analysis of the key recommendations before determining the best way forward to address these issues successfully.

The government expects to be able to provide more information on this way forward next year. While this analysis is being undertaken, the government will continue to monitor the performance of the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council, the ICCRC, and will refer complaints of unauthorized practitioners to the Canada Border Services Agency.

In addition, the government will continue to urge the public not to use unauthorized consultants and to file complaints with the ICCRC in the event that one of its members provides unprofessional and unethical advice and representation. I encourage the committee and my colleagues to do the same.

To help with this, IRCC will provide an information toolkit to the committee and MPs to support its outreach efforts. This is because public awareness and public education are key to helping immigration clients protect themselves and report offences to our law enforcement authorities. It might be helpful to this debate to have a bit more context about how the regulation of consultants currently works, as well as what constitutes unethical or unprofessional behaviour on the part of consultants.

As I mentioned, the ICCRC has been designated by legislation and the minister as the regulator of immigration and citizenship consultants. It is a self-governing, not-for-profit body that has an arm's length relationship with IRCC. It currently has more than 3,700 active members.

Routine Proceedings

The ICCRC manages members' entry-to-practice standards, including training, testing, and accreditation, as well as professional requirements such as education obligations. The ICCRC is also responsible for ensuring that an effective complaints and discipline process for members is enforced.

As I said earlier, the government is always prepared to take action against unscrupulous and fraudulent activities by immigration and citizenship consultants when it becomes aware of, or suspects, improper activities. One such damaging activity can include acting as a so-called "ghost consultant", that is, providing or offering to provide advice or representation for a fee at any stage of an immigration application or proceeding without being authorized to do so. Authorization means being a member in good standing of the ICCRC, a lawyer or paralegal who is a member in good standing of a Canadian provincial or territorial law society, or a notary who is a member in good standing of the *Chambre des notaires du Québec*.

When Government of Canada officials believe that an authorized representative has contravened any professional or ethical obligations, they have clear authority to share this information with the respective governing body, be it the ICCRC or the provincial law society, in a manner consistent with the Privacy Act.

●(1050)

The council has a mandate to govern such consultants by employing tools such as their code of professional ethics and code of business conduct and ethics. It also has the authority to investigate allegations of unethical or unprofessional behaviour on the part of authorized consultants.

Here are some examples of what constitutes improper or unethical activities that can be shared with the council: making false promises to an applicant, providing false information about Canada's immigration processes, failing to provide services agreed to between the representative and client, and counselling to obtain or submit false evidence.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canada Border Services Agency are responsible for investigating both authorized consultants who engage in criminal offences, such as fraud, and ghost consultants who operate outside of the law governing immigration representatives.

The committee has made significant recommendations regarding this regulatory framework, many of which would include legislative amendments. As mentioned in the government's response to the report, the government is committed to thoroughly examining the recommendations, options, and possible changes.

In addition to providing recommendations related to consultants, the committee also made a number of recommendations related to procedures for processing applications and for communicating with clients and prospective applicants.

I can assure my fellow members of Parliament that the government is committed to delivering the best possible client service in both of these areas. IRCC knows that its clients want processes that make sense to them, they want reliable information about their case status, and they want to know someone is listening when they raise concerns.

There are a few recent examples of improvements being undertaken that I can point to today, including a revamp of how processing times are communicated online, a plain-language review of our refusal letter, a pilot project to text family sponsorship clients when their applications reach the department, and improvements to case status messaging in clients' online accounts.

Significant changes have also been made to improve the forms and tools provided to applicants. Some lines of business, including express entry and electronic travel authorization, are already using dynamic online applications instead of application forms.

IRCC is already making efforts to identify where forms can be improved or simplified, and to flag to clients areas where mistakes are commonly made. These efforts will be ongoing, and the department uses client feedback to continue making changes going forward.

In addition, IRCC understands that the department's client base has a range of abilities when speaking an official language. Agents are therefore trained in techniques to communicate efficiently with clients in clear and simple language and to be alert and sensitive towards clients with varying degrees of fluency in our official languages. IRCC's Client Support Centre also has a standard process to facilitate calls between agent and client when an interpreter is used to assist in the communication.

In addition to providing clearer information on processes for application, IRCC also understands the need to provide more information to clients about the rules regarding legal representation and applications prepared with the aid of an unauthorized practitioner. The department will continue to encourage clients to come forward and report such individuals.

Addressing the problem of unauthorized practitioners and providing relevant information to all clients is a priority for IRCC. This priority is also in line with the department's client service goals. IRCC will continue to provide information about clients' rights and responsibilities. It will do this through its website, in application guides, and on the "Use of a Representative" form.

The government is committed to continued exploration of additional changes that could be made. This could include further simplification of the language in the guides and forms and on the departmental website. IRCC is also exploring engagement with clients on a number of fronts in order to better understand the challenges they face when dealing with these processes.

IRCC actively monitors feedback received in an effort to improve services and target public awareness. It is worth noting that the department participates in Fraud Prevention Month by communicating fraud prevention messaging to Canadians, newcomers, and potential immigrants.

●(1055)

This happens through a number of avenues, including social media.

Routine Proceedings

IRCC will also continue to work with Canada's diplomatic missions abroad to increase public awareness about unauthorized representatives.

Once again, I want to assure my colleagues both on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and in this place that the government is seized with the important issues raised by the committee's report.

Like the committee, we want to protect the interests of individuals who are applying to immigrate to Canada, while at the same time safeguarding the integrity of the immigration program. Their well-being is crucial, as is the integrity of the system as a whole. It is imperative that any action we take is in the best interests of newcomers, applicants, legitimate authorized consultants, and also Canadians, more broadly. We must always consider any potential impacts on public confidence in our immigration system.

That is why the Government will be taking a serious and detailed look at the committee's report and the ways that we can address their concerns.

Once again, I thank the Committee for their report. It has certainly provided much food for thought.

As mentioned in its written response to the report, the government expects to be able to provide more information on the way forward next year. I look forward to being able to report back to my fellow members then.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, he has a government appointment. I wonder if he can inform the House if the government will be supporting concurrence in this report and if he personally will be voting in favour of concurrence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, we have received the report and will be reviewing it carefully. We will consider the proposed recommendations.

Many witnesses were heard. I will reiterate that we want to tackle the problem of unauthorized consultants. The department is committed to delivering the best possible service to newcomers and potential immigrants to Canada and ensuring that they are not victims of fraud.

We will consider the committee's recommendations very carefully. We are already doing some work with regard to client service. We want to be sure to protect people who may be vulnerable to certain types of fraud.

Again, we will consider the recommendations very carefully and come back with an appropriate response in due course.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the report was actually tabled in June 2017, and the minister responded to the committee in October 2017, which was four months later. It is now the end of November, five months later, and the government is

still studying the issue. It is not as if the issue just surfaced yesterday. This has been going on for years and years.

My question to the parliamentary secretary is whether the government will do the minimum, which is the recommendation in the report to protect the people who have been abused, who have complaints, so they can come forward and lodge these complaints without fear of reprisal and with a level of protection so that they can speak freely about the abuses they have had to endure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her comments.

That is exactly what we want to do. We want to protect these people who are vulnerable to abuse by unauthorized consultants.

The report was indeed tabled a few months ago, but it takes time to do things right. Our government is committed to taking the necessary time to carefully consider its recommendations. The government wants to protect those who are most vulnerable or who have experienced abuse and fraud.

I can assure the member that this report is being taken very seriously by our department and by the minister. As I said in my speech, we will come back with a response by next year, hopefully along with concrete measures for putting an end to unregulated practices and abuse towards newcomers and potential immigrants to Canada.

● (1100)

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are not clear answers to the questions at all. I do not understand why the Liberal government has such a hard time saying yes or no to simple questions. The member for Calgary Nose Hill asked if the member and the government are going to support bringing the report in, yes or no, and the other member asked whether the government is going to implement the 21 recommendations, yes or no. I would put those same questions to the member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, it would be very easy to provide a simple yes or no answer, but I also want to add that we inherited a completely broken system from the former government.

We have made a lot of progress since taking office, and I would like to list just a few of the things we have done. First, we have welcomed over 46,000 refugees, unlike the previous government, which welcomed only three Yazidi refugees. We also reinstated the interim federal health program, and we are reuniting families more quickly by reducing wait times from over 26 months to 12 months. We amended the Citizenship Act, implemented protections for the LGBTQ community, and made changes to the express entry program.

The list of things we have done to improve our immigration system since taking office is very long. Once again, we plan to carefully review this report and implement its recommendations. However, we also want to protect the most vulnerable members of our society and ensure that they do not fall victim to unauthorized immigration consultants.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things we need to look at is why consultants are used and whether there are things we can do in government to make things more client friendly. My colleague made reference to access to the Internet and their files and looking at changing forms.

Also noteworthy is that often people go to consultants because of a sense of frustration with, say, processing times. People who get married and wait two or three years, often out of frustration look at what they can do to speed it up, and they will often go to consultants.

I know that the government has made significant gains in decreasing processing times. I am wondering if my colleague would comment in regard to that issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We did in fact make numerous improvements to client service. For example, we simplified the application forms. Also, as my colleague mentioned, we made changes to the family reunification program, and we reduced wait times, which stretched to more than 26 months under the previous government, to just 12 months.

We also recently announced a historic multi-year plan to eliminate the backlogs we inherited from the previous government. We are determined to improve the immigration system and ensure that people who want to come to Canada contribute to our diversity and our economy. We need those people in Canada.

We will continue to be a country that is open to immigrants, but we also want to protect the health and safety of Canadians. We are determined to make the immigration system better than it was under the previous government.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I have a news flash for the parliamentary secretary. The problems with crooked consultants actually started many, many years ago under the Chrétien government, under the Paul Martin government, and they continue today.

The parliamentary secretary stated that CBSA is investigating these matters. I actually have a case I brought to the government's attention. It is about a class action. A crooked consultant basically cheated migrant workers, ripped them off, supposedly in exchange for service. They are not allowed to say that people will have to pay x amount of money to obtain a job. This is exactly what has happened. CBSA has investigated the matter and has recommended that charges be laid. That has been advanced and put forward, and still no charges have been laid. Why?

• (1105)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

As I said in my speech, we are working with our various partners to put an end to these predatory practices. I am sure that the case

raised by the hon. member is taken very seriously by our various partners. Again, if the hon. member listened to my speech, she should know that the government is fully committed to ensuring that these predatory practices come to an end.

I thank the hon. member across the way for the work she did in committee on this issue. I assure her that over the coming year we will have very positive recommendations on the matter to ensure that these people never have to suffer this abuse and be cheated again. Our government takes this report very seriously and we will respond to its recommendations in the very near future.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

However, I can understand the reaction of my colleagues on this side of the aisle. I see that there has indeed been improvement in terms of speed, or so my constituency assistant tells me. She does an exceptional and thorough job handling cases in my riding. These are problems we encounter often, and although there has been some progress, I urge the government to start paying attention to the reality that hon. members are facing. In the House, we very rarely talk about the role of members and our staff. However, we are part of the system. In the House, members' experiences can contribute a great deal to the discussion and I hope that the government will listen over the next two hours.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I have to say that we too are handling a lot of cases in our offices. That is exactly why we want to improve the department's client service and the application process.

I am from the riding of Acadie—Bathurst. There is very little immigration to my region. I did not know much about the immigration system. Since becoming the parliamentary secretary for the department, I have learned a lot about it, and I know how some of the more complex cases can be hard to work on. I can assure my colleague of our full co-operation. No matter the case, the minister, the department, and I will be there to find solutions to any issues and problems that arise.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important motion for us to engage in, and I certainly hope that every member of this House, who has constituents who rely on immigration consultants to help them go through and navigate the process of immigrating to Canada or getting access to a pathway to Canada, supports this motion.

We are talking about a report that was done at committee; and by the way, the committee spent a series of meetings listening to witnesses on the critical issue of the immigration process, and more specifically about how so many of them have been ripped off by what we call crooked consultants. In that process, we also learned that the self-regulating body from the profession has been failing those individuals.

Routine Proceedings

It has not only been failing the applicants, but I believe it has been failing all of Canada. I say that because so much of the integrity of our system depends on consultants' work. When the body fails in ensuring that people are doing their job properly, when it fails to ensure immigration consultants are acting responsibly and ethically, then that infringes on our reputation in Canada. Hence, this report is absolutely urgent. It was one of those rare occasions where a report was supported by every member of the committee, across all party lines. There were no dissenting reports, no supplemental reports of any sort, and we all agreed that urgent action needs to be taken now.

As I mentioned earlier, the report was submitted to the government back in June. We waited and waited for the government to respond, and finally in October the minister wrote to the chair of the committee in response. The letter, dated October 13, basically comes down to the government saying that it will look at the issue further. When I received that letter, I was devastated. I was so disappointed with that response, because it is not as if this issue emerged yesterday. It is not as if this was some sort of controversial issue. Rather, it was an issue where every member of that committee unanimously accepted the recommendations. In total, I believe there were 21 recommendations advanced. Each of them is valid and supported by every committee member, yet the government does not have the wherewithal to act on even one of them.

In my view, if the government seriously wants to ensure people are protected, at minimum it could take action on recommendation number 10 in the report before we break for the holiday season, which states:

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada create a mechanism that will effectively allow individuals who have been abused by unscrupulous representatives to file a complaint without fear it will jeopardize their application or status.

That is the minimum the government can do, and that would send a very clear message to all those who have been cheated and abused in this process that they have protection afforded to them. The most important protection they are seeking is to ensure their application or status would not be put in jeopardy. Surely the government can do that.

For many of the individuals, immigrating to Canada is not an easy journey. The immigration process is often difficult and complex, so some have sought the help of third parties such as family members, friends, lawyers, or immigration consultants. Sadly, in some of these cases unscrupulous representatives take advantage of those individuals' dreams of having a better life for themselves and their families.

● (1110)

I have to go back in history a bit. The regulatory body, which used to be the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants, was the first governing body established in 2003 as an independent federally incorporated not-for-profit body operating at arm's length from the federal government and responsible for regulating paid immigration consultants. In 2004, CSIC was recognized in the regulations as the organization responsible for regulating paid immigration consultants.

Fast-forward to 2008, and the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration undertook a study of the immigration consultants and its report highlighted issues with CSIC's governance and accountability framework, which did not ensure that immigration

consultants were being adequately regulated in the public interest with respect to the provision of professional and ethical consultation, representation, and advice. That was back in 2008. Problems existed with the first self-regulatory agency, and the government undertook a study on this. It found all sorts of problems and then put forward the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council, in this place, which was incorporated and came into force in October of 2014.

Just this year, we undertook to do a study and found that, lo and behold, problems exist with that regulatory body that was newly established, though maybe not so new because it was established back in 2014. The problems were so grave that the committee put forward a report with 21 recommendations, unanimously urging the government to act. It said the time for self-regulation of this industry has come to an end and it cannot be trusted to do this work. The situation goes on and on, and people continue to be hurt in the community. The committee called for the government to establish a government-regulated agency. Until the profession can prove that it can be trusted again, we cannot allow this path to continue. That is what we are talking about.

Let me highlight, by the way, what happened in committee, so every member of this House knows. The committee heard from some 50 witnesses during eight meetings that were held between March 6, 2017, and May 29, 2017. It received a number of written submissions as well. It was not as if it was a quick study. The committee did an in-depth study. A number of witnesses highlighted tremendous problems that have been going on with ICCRC, and said the time has come for drastic action to be taken by government.

Let me share the issues we face with members of the House. First, on the issue of investigation, the ICCRC is responsible for regulating paid immigration consultants. It also has the authority to investigate allegations of unethical or unprofessional behaviour of authorized immigration consultants. The RCMP and CBSA are both responsible for investigating authorized consultants who engage in fraud, and ghost consultants who operate outside the law governing immigration representatives. I bring this up as a major issue. Why is that? Let us take this information for a spin.

One witness at committee informed us that she trusted an immigration consultant with her live-in caregiver application and paid her for services, only to be left stranded one day after her arrival in Canada, with no employer, no financial resources, and none of her belongings. Sadly, this is a story we have heard before. In fact, there is a current class action lawsuit, which I will highlight later, on the vulnerabilities of many individuals like the witness who presented to the committee. While the in-depth problem is unknown to all of us, more and more stories of exploitation are emerging, and that is what we are seeing.

Routine Proceedings

● (1115)

Currently, there are approximately 3,600 ICCRC members. ICCRC stated that it receives on average 300 complaints a year. As of the end of December 2016, there were 1,710 complaints filed against consultants, which is almost two complaints for every member. How is that the situation?

CBSA stated that it has 126 active investigations of immigration consultants related to the IRPA offences. In the context of the number of complaints we have, I submit that CBSA does not have enough resources to do its work.

I have a case that should be of interest to every single member in the House, and more importantly, to the government, because as I said, when we have unscrupulous practices taking place, such as these kinds of situations, they undermine our reputation as a country and undermine our immigration system.

It is inhumane for someone to take advantage of individuals and families who rely on them, who have scarce resources. They come up with the resources, because they desperately want to make sure that their applications are done properly and that they enhance their chance of success in getting a permanent pathway to Canada. However, when we allow the situation to continue, when we know about it, we are part of the problem. That cannot be allowed to happen.

I mentioned the class action lawsuit. Let me share this information with members of the House.

Canada has admitted more temporary foreign workers than immigrants since 2006. Migrant workers are desperate to seek opportunities to better their lives and those of their families. As a result, as I mentioned, they are often subject to abuse and exploitation.

Recently, four foreign temporary workers won the right to a class action suit against Mac's and three immigrant consulting services: Overseas Immigration Services, Overseas Career and Consulting, and Trident Immigration Services. These companies are controlled by a Surrey resident, Kuldeep Bansal, who allegedly charged the workers money to obtain jobs at Mac's, but those migrant workers arrived in Canada only to find that most of those jobs did not exist.

Access to information requests revealed that LMIOs were issued for 486 positions with Mac's through these immigration consultant companies between 2012 and early 2014. Charles Gordon, one of the lawyers representing the workers, said:

Victims of this scheme were recruited in job fairs held in Dubai. They paid around \$8,000 in fees in exchange for the promise of a job in Canada. Typically, they paid \$2,000, often in cash, in Dubai, to get the process started, and then once they received an employment offer and an LMO, they had to wire another \$6,000 before Overseas would provide them the documents allowing them come to Canada.

It was extremely disturbing for me to learn that potentially hundreds of temporary foreign workers were victimized. People were duped with a false promise and treated as commodities that could be shipped into Canada, used up, and discarded. What is even more disturbing is that this practice continues.

CBSA has supported a number of the victims from overseas in obtaining temporary resident permits while it conducted an

investigation into Bansal overseas. We understand that CBSA has been waiting for some time for approval of the charges.

Hundreds of migrants in this class action suit were exploited, and they are trying to seek justice from the government. With respect to this case and to the depth of this issue, I would like to share with the House a typical story.

● (1120)

This is the story of Amila Perera. He is from Sri Lanka, where his wife and children live. While living and working in Dubai, Amila was introduced by a friend to Mr. Bansal, who encouraged him to attend a seminar put on by one of Mr. Bansal's companies, Overseas Immigration Services. Overseas was advertising that it was recruiting for certain positions in Canada and would guarantee job allocation.

Mr. Amila paid Overseas an initial installment of approximately \$2,500 Canadian to get the job placement process started. That was around March 2013. Mr. Bansal then told him that Overseas would find him a job in Canada. Shortly after, Amila received a labour market opinion, a job offer, and an employment contract to work as a food service supervisor at Mac's, in the Lower Mainland in British Columbia, as part of Canada's temporary foreign worker program.

Once Amila received his visa, Mr. Bansal asked for the remaining \$6,000 Canadian. Amila asked if he could pay it in instalments, but Mr. Bansal stated that the whole amount had to be paid before Amila could come to Canada. Amila then sold everything he had in Dubai to raise \$5,000. He borrowed the remaining \$1,000, all of which was paid in January 2014.

For several months thereafter, Amila was without work, and his income had ended, of course, in Dubai, and he returned home to Sri Lanka, waiting for confirmation to come to Canada. Months went by while he pursued it. When he was finally able to connect with Overseas, he was informed that it was sending him a plane ticket to leave for Canada the following day and that he had to have \$1,000 Canadian with him when he arrived in Canada, or he would be denied entry.

He and his wife then spent their last 24 hours rushing around selling all of her jewellery and borrowing money to gather the additional \$1,000. Overseas representatives then instructed Amila not to bring any documents to Canada that could connect him with Overseas, and specifically instructed him to destroy all the emails and receipts connected to Overseas.

Upon arriving in Canada, in April 2014, Amila followed Overseas' direction and took a taxi to a basement suite in Surrey, where three other workers were living in a two-bedroom suite. Over the following week, 10 to 12 workers arrived at the apartment. There was nowhere for him to sleep, and he had no food.

Ready to work for Mac's, Amila went to Overseas' office, where he was informed that he had to wait for a position to become available. After a couple of weeks of waiting, Amila was sent to work as a cashier at a Mac's in Kitimat, B.C., where he was set up with a one-bedroom unfurnished apartment with another temporary foreign worker.

Routine Proceedings

Upon beginning work, Amila was initially working a lot of hours, but gradually his hours were reduced. He and the other worker began panicking, because they had very little money to buy food and to pay for rent and the household amenities they needed. The two workers shared a blanket and slept on the floor. They could not even afford a mattress. This went on, and the hours of work died down. Every day they were walking into town to try to find work, without success.

At some point, they met someone from a community group, a good-hearted person, who raised the money and sent Amila back to the Lower Mainland. He then hooked up with community organizations there to pursue justice.

That is the history. That is the reality of many people who are being cheated by unscrupulous immigration consultants. We have a report before us with 21 recommendations dealing with this issue. They are recommendations the government can act on now.

We need to make sure that those being abused are not afraid to come forward to pursue justice. We need the government to make a commitment that it will act on these recommendations. I get that it will take some time to set up a new system to do this, but the government must make that commitment and say that it will do it. Let us put in a transition process to transit to a proper process, a proper regulatory system, a proper complaint system, so that the people are not taken advantage of. Last but not least, I call on the government to resource CBSA so that it can do its job.

• (1125)

Finally, where CBSA has done its job and is waiting for the government to prosecute these crooked consultants, let us get on with it and do it. Justice needs to be served, and we can start here by making it happen in the House.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite. That was informative, it was precise, and it highlighted the challenges we face in our country with an immigration system that has been fixed with layer upon layer of revisions, as opposed to a comprehensive reset.

I think all of us as MPs know that when one single department generates 75% to 80% of our work, depending on our ridings, there is something wrong. The front-line workers in this department, quite frankly, are the constituency assistants who staff our constituency offices. There is a challenge here.

I would like to thank the member opposite for, in particular, highlighting the way in which some arrivals in our country are exploited by a private sector group of individuals who, quite frankly, do not have at heart the best interests of our country, let alone their clients, let alone the reputation of the immigration system.

I would like to get some direction. Beyond the recommendations from the parliamentary committee she highlighted, there are other components of the immigration process that also see this insertion of the private sector into what should be a totally public sector process to enrol new arrivals to Canada into citizenship and into working in our country. In terms of the temporary foreign worker program and the way we bring people in, I would like to hear her thoughts on not only how we make that system fairer, more efficient, and more

transparent but also on what her recommendations might be around the path to citizenship and what that should look like as we move forward. It is not just landing people in the country that matters; it is also making sure that their future in the country is a positive one.

• (1130)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged by the comments from the member. I hope he will actually vote in support of the motion before us. Let us stand up unanimously in the House, as we did at committee, in support of all 21 recommendations, and let us take some action on that before Christmas.

With respect to the question around temporary foreign workers, I am delighted that the member asked the question. I have long been an advocate of the principle that if people are good enough to work, they are good enough to stay. That is what we need to do. I question whether a lot of the temporary foreign workers that have been brought to my attention are truly temporary foreign workers.

There are people who come to Canada who have been separated from their families, and some of them have been subjected to this kind of unscrupulous practice by bad immigration consultants. We can actually deal with that. We have a skilled labour shortage we need to meet here in Canada. If those needs are ongoing, should they be temporary foreign workers, or should they be coming as immigrants at the outset? I submit that they should be coming as immigrants right at the outset.

I would also say to the government that it needs to change the policy to allow not just high-skilled workers but workers with all levels of skill to come to Canada as permanent residents at the outset.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her work on this study as well. She brought a lot of valid perspectives to the table. I am encouraged that she is advocating that this report be concurred in in the House.

I want to give her an opportunity to perhaps expand a little more on the concept my colleague from the Liberal Party raised with regard to temporary foreign workers and this being a larger problem, both in terms of the committee report on immigration consultants and the fact that over the last several years, we have seen businesses use the low-skilled temporary foreign worker stream as a way to build their business models. We have seen wages depressed in the low-skilled worker sector because of the use of temporary foreign workers.

To her point, we should not be creating a caste system in Canada, where we are bringing in temporary foreign workers to do jobs that no other Canadians want to do. We should be looking at why that is the case. Perhaps it is working conditions. Perhaps it is wages. We should be ensuring that those people coming into our country have a path to citizenship.

I just wanted to give the member a little more time to continue her thoughts.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member as well for her work.

Routine Proceedings

This report has all-party support. There really is no politics around it. This report is about making sure that our immigration system improves and, more importantly, that it better serves the people who rely on immigration consultants to help them find a path to Canada.

On the larger question, our immigration policy focuses on highly skilled workers, but the truth of the matter is that we need all kinds of skill levels here in Canada. We have a labour shortage. Our demographics are changing. People are getting older or retiring. More people in the Atlantic provinces are dying than being born. We have a major issue here and until we face it, we are not really going to solve the problem.

I would also argue that if we truly want to build our nation, we need to look at our immigration numbers. Right now, the government's own experts have called for a much higher number than the government has proposed, but the government will not implement that higher number. The experts have called for 1% of the overall population at least, while others have called for 450,000 immigrants.

We recognize the fact that immigrants helped to build out nation. We need to continue with a policy that reflects that in our immigration system today.

• (1135)

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues who serve on the committee.

I want to remind members that this study was initiated by a colleague of mine, the member of Parliament for Willowdale. I agree with both of my colleagues on the other side that this is a joint report supported by all parties. The issue is serious and I would encourage the minister and the government to take it seriously.

I want to remind the member that there was some positive news. Some of the people she mentioned who faced severe treatment by their consultants did get help from CBSA and were able to stay in Canada.

What could be done in the interim until a new government-regulated body is created? What are the best safeguards that our minister could implement so that immigrants already in Canada who may be victims of unscrupulous consultants can get safe support quickly while this is being implemented?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, the member is exactly right. This issue was brought before us by a Liberal committee member. On that basis, I really hope that every single member of the House will support the motion before us, because we do need to get on with it. There is a sense of urgency about this, because the people who need help are desperate. Some people have been provided with support by CBSA, but not everyone. Moreover, we heard at committee from numerous people who know of others who are afraid to come forward to speak because they are afraid they will somehow be penalized when they make a complaint. People who are not on the committee told me that as well.

Recommendation 10 in the report calls for the government to set up a mechanism that would allow individuals who have been abused by unscrupulous representatives to file a complaint without of it somehow jeopardizing their application or status. That is critically important. The government could do something right now to ensure

that it happens. If we could get a commitment from the government that all 21 recommendations would be acted on and that in the interim, this recommendation would be brought in to protect people, that would go a long way.

I would also argue that we need to resource the CBSA. We heard from CBSA officials themselves that they do not have enough resources and that they only investigate major cases with multiple implications for one immigration consultant. They are not investigating individual cases, and all of those are just falling through the cracks. We cannot allow that to happen. Resources need to go to CBSA to pursue that. Where it recommends that charges be laid, let us lay charges, so that people will know that consultants will not be allowed to get away with this kind of behaviour.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will start by commenting on the previous speaker's response to one of the questions on immigration in general and how important it is to our country. As she pointed out, the populations of some communities are actually decreasing. In fact, I would argue there was a 10-year period when my province's population would have decreased were it not for immigration.

We are celebrating Canada's 150th birthday this year, and we often talk about the importance of diversity and how that has enriched the very fabric of our society and who we are. We are a nation of immigrants and are dependent on immigration. As we look forward to our future success as a nation, it will be driven in good part by sound immigration policy. I am encouraged by the comments from both sides of the House. I know that in the Liberal caucus, there is a huge expectation that we will be able to have solid immigration policy because we understand just how important it is to our nation.

For me personally, there is no issue that I have dealt with more than immigration in my constituency office, both as a member of Parliament and as a member of the Manitoba legislature, in the last 25-plus years. We have been dealing with immigration work every day for many years in my constituency office. I understand the different streams and different problems that are there.

Some have talked about consultants not being an issue, and others about the problems arising from consultants today. However, this issue has existed for decades. I remember standing inside the Manitoba legislature calling for action against unscrupulous immigration consultants. This was back in the early nineties, or, quite possibly, if I searched the Manitoba legislature's Hansard, it might even go back to the late eighties when I first raised the need to make changes to the way immigration was being processed and how we in government could be of assistance. Therefore, I understand why this is such an important issue, and I would like to be able to contribute to the debate.

Routine Proceedings

Maybe one of the ways I can do that is by talking about the need to understand why people use consultants. Who are the people we are really talking about? They are the family and friends who are here and who call Canada home. If they want to sponsor someone abroad, they are often the ones who will turn to consultants. We also have individuals who are living abroad and looking to come to Canada. A phenomenal amount of advertising is done in some countries abroad to try to lure people, who ultimately become victims of the inappropriate behaviour of immigration consultants and others. We do not want to limit it to just the issue of immigration consultants, because we also hear about global employment agencies, which is another fancy combination of words often used, that end up exploiting immigrants.

I came to appreciate the issue shortly after the late nineties, when Prime Minister Jean Chrétien came up with the wonderful provincial nominee program. It has been a goldmine for the Province of Manitoba. I know that at one time Manitoba led the country in the development of that program by receiving well over 30% of all nominees coming to Canada.

● (1140)

During the late nineties, specifically 1998-99, the provincial nominee pilot project came to the province of Manitoba. At the time we would get 300 people applying under that program. It led into 2003, and I would like to share some of the tangible experiences I had with it. I want to do this because people who are following the debate will understand what we are talking about, as opposed to just immigration consultants and all the bad work they are doing. There are many immigration consultants who provide a phenomenal and fantastic service. We have to be very careful that we do not label everyone in that industry as bad and evil. It is an industry that plays a very important role.

Let me give some specific examples. One of my first experiences was in 1991, when I made a trip abroad to meet with a family. The father had indicated that his daughter was recruited to move to Canada. He thought she would be working in the hospitality industry. That is what he was told and she was led to believe, but she was exploited. As a result, she became a victim, and that opened my eyes to the degree to which people were being exploited, speaking firsthand to a father who had a relatively young daughter leave their homeland and come to Canada. That is on the micro scale.

Somewhere between 2004 and 2006, I was invited to the province of Isabela in the Philippines. The governor of the province and others wanted me to go on the radio to talk about the Manitoba provincial nominee program. I was a very strong advocate of that program. I thought it was interesting that they wanted me to talk about how important it was that people did not have to use immigration consultants to come here under the Manitoba nominee program.

When I did the radio interviews and an immigration educational forum, I quickly learned why I was asked to go there. Individuals had been going to Isabela in the Philippines to promote the Manitoba nominee program, but charged significant amounts of money to get the papers required to submit the application form. The application form is free. There is no charge. If people went to the Manitoba website, they could download it and fill it out. It is pretty much

consumer or client friendly, but they were charging anywhere from \$100 to \$400 to have that basic application. If we do the math of the number of people applying for that, the money adds up very quickly.

Later that day after one of the radio interviews, I led the immigration discussion at one of the universities, where over 2,000 people showed up. I was amazed at not only the level of interest in coming to Canada or checking it out, but also the degree to which individuals were prepared to pay money to make the trip. They wanted to be able to come to Canada.

Back then anyone could say they wanted to be an immigration consultant. They would provide advice and charge hundreds of dollars for a basic package of paper that anyone could have downloaded over the Internet, and maybe assist people in filling it out. We started hearing about hundreds, then thousands of dollars being paid to process nominee applications.

● (1145)

This is an issue I had raised in the Manitoba legislature, that we needed to do what we could, and then we started to see the government take a more proactive approach in terms of educating. In my office, we process well over 400 cases a month of immigration-related matters and incorporating visiting visas. I am probably underestimating the number by saying 400 cases. If I told people the actual number, I suspect they would doubt I am being serious with the numbers. We do a lot of immigration work.

In my opinion, 90%-plus of immigration work being done could probably be done by someone who has basic skills in processing their own paperwork. Very rarely, there are times where I would advise someone to go to a consultant or immigration lawyer; both can be credible resources in certain situations. Often, immigration files can become fairly complicated, especially if they go to an appeal or to Federal Court.

During this debate over the next couple of hours, it is important we recognize that, yes, there is a lot of bad out there, but we should not generalize it and label every immigration consultant as a bad person because they do provide a service that is, in fact, needed.

In looking at some of the recommendations the committee has put together, there are some fantastic ones. The speaker before me commented in regard to having individuals report and feel they are able to report when there has been abuse. It is a pretty decent recommendation. I would like to be able to look into the even matter further, because it is important we have some sort of accountability in place. What options do people really have?

If we have constituents who require or are looking for assistance because maybe they have gotten married, adopted a child, or are sponsoring a person through any of several streams either directly or indirectly, one of the first stops they should consider is their local member of Parliament's office. All services provided by MPs' offices are free.

Routine Proceedings

As I have said, in the vast majority of those cases consultants and lawyers are not required. If things get really complicated in that initial discussion, an MP's office might make the suggestion that someone might want to consider a consultant or lawyer. Whenever I meet with constituents and provide opinions, I will talk about calling the 1-800 number. There is a 1-800 number that deals with immigration issues, and I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to get a good understanding of what they can or cannot do. The workers have the policy books there. I find it to be a fantastic source of information. What happens with constituents who I may meet at the local restaurant on a Saturday morning or at my constituency office is that I will often give an opinion and then suggest to them that they should also contact the 1-800 phone number. A lot depends on how complicated a specific file might be.

● (1150)

There are opportunities for members of Parliament to engage in many streams. I think the most common stream is visiting visas, temporary visas, in general. Focusing just on visiting visas, they are a very important aspect of the immigration file. Many consultants and lawyers get involved. In that regard, I try to convey a very straightforward message. For example, if people are in the Punjab and going to Chandigarh, what should they know in submitting their applications? They should understand that immigration officers want to know if they have a reason to come to Canada, if they are in good health, do they have good character, do they have the financial means, and if visas are issued, would they return to their home country. If the answer to all of those questions is yes, an overall assessment is done and is favourable, visas will be issued.

The initial application is pretty much straightforward. That is not to say that people do not need immigration consultants or lawyers, but in a vast majority of cases, they are not necessary. They can go to their local members of Parliament, who will provide letters of support, which may be helpful in assisting them to meet some of the criteria. These are the types of issues that are dealt with every day. Tens of thousands of applications are made every week through our embassies around the world.

It is the same with regard to student visas. There is a certain process that has to be followed. I try to emphasize, whether it is visiting visas, student visas, or working visas, all of which are temporary, they are all fairly straightforward, but so are the applications themselves. The parliamentary secretary talked about the process, and there are things the government has done, some very tangible things. One of them is looking at processing times. Often individuals get frustrated because of lengthy processing times, wonder if there is something else they can do, and start looking for other ways to get ahead of the line. No one gets ahead of the line, nor should anyone get ahead of the line, unless there are outstanding circumstances, which are very rare.

As I said, MPs' offices can provide the services and guidance and they need to ensure their constituents are aware of those services. If members of Parliament use the resources they have and reach out to their constituents, they can play a leading role in dealing with the exploitation that is taking place today in a very real and tangible way.

I understand the importance of a regulatory body. I can appreciate that the current regulatory body, for a number of reasons, has not met the expectations of members of Parliament or the public as a whole, and there is room for major improvement. I appreciate the work that the standing committee did on this issue. I used to sit on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and only wish it had dealt with this particular issue a number of years ago. I appreciate the efforts it put in and its recommendations. I read through a number of the recommendations, which seem to be fairly sound, and I look forward to the government's response to them.

Like everyone else, I have a fairly good appreciation of the wide spectrum of abuse and exploitation taking place both in Canada and abroad. There are far too many victims, and good immigration consultants and lawyers would agree with that statement. Where we can improve the system, we should.

● (1155)

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said there is a lot of bad out there. We all know how many people are getting ripped off \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000. We know the issues. We heard from people from many countries how they were hosed by these people.

It is not too often all parties get together to recommend something, and in this case we did. Six months or seven months have passed, and so far nothing is being done.

Does the government have a plan to take those committee recommendations and implement them? If it is going to do it, when?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would not make an assumption that the government is just letting the report sit on a shelf and collect dust.

We have made a fairly strong statement through the standing committee. The government takes the recommendations very seriously. Members on this side of the House, those Liberal members on the standing committee, will ensure that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is very much aware of the recommendations. The expectation that our caucus has of the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is very high on all immigration matters.

As the member points out, we are all aware of the exploitation. It has gone into the hundreds and thousands. The member across the way makes reference to \$30,000, \$40,000. That happens all the time. A lot of people would find that hard to believe. There is a huge amount of exploitation that takes place. A lot of that exploitation is against people who are selling all sorts of assets, back in those homelands, in order for one individual's application to be successful.

There are so many sad stories. I can assure the member that the department is in fact looking over the recommendations. Where we can take action sooner, as opposed to later, I assume that would be taking place.

The standing committee has done fine work in listening to representations on this particular issue. I believe there are 21 recommendations in total. I can assure the member that the department is fully aware and appreciates the hard work of the standing committee.

Routine Proceedings

• (1200)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated the response to the last question, but it is not the same response we got when we asked the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, who ought to know what is going on in the department and what actions it is taking.

When he was directly asked if the government would support the concurrence of this report, and if it would do the 21 recommendations, he would not provide a direct answer.

Could the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader comment on the difference there?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe there was any difference whatsoever.

The member across the way asked the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship about concurrence in the report. I was asked to provide comments in regard to the recommendations. I indicated that there are many recommendations in that report that I am very supportive of.

I have not had the chance to read through all 21 and look into the background of all 21 recommendations. However, I recognize, and I made the suggestion to my colleague across the way and I would do the same for this particular member, that there are many recommendations in the report, and I would not make any assumption, at all, that the government is not acting on some of those recommendations.

Things take time to move forward. The committee has pointed out, in an unanimous way, a number of good, solid recommendations. What we ultimately do in terms of the vote on the concurrence of the report will be found out in due course.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague was asking a simple question. What we are seeing, on the Liberal side at least, is an inability to answer yes or no to questions.

On the concurrence of the report from the immigration committee, a unanimous report with 21 reasonable recommendations, will the government side be voting in favour, yes or no?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the persistence in wanting to get an answer on how I will be voting once the concurrence vote comes. I would encourage my colleague to wait and see how I will be voting.

I have talked about the fact that we have many recommendations that have come from that report. Having had the opportunity to go through many of those recommendations, I think there are some fantastic things in there. I tried to emphasize, now to the third member of the Conservative Party, that I would not make any assumptions in regard to the government's actions to date. There are actions through the Department of Citizenship and Immigration that, no doubt, will come out in time, which reflect on some of the fine work that the standing committee did on this particular issue.

As has been pointed out throughout the debate, this is not a new issue. This issue has been there for many years, as I reflected in my opening remarks. Back in the early 1990s, and quite possibly the late

1980s, I remember talking about immigration consultants and this unethical behaviour.

Therefore, I think we should be patient and wait. We will see what takes place. All I can tell the member across the way is that we have both the former and current ministers of immigration who have done fantastic work in advancing the important files related to immigration.

As a government, we recognize the true value in many different ways that a sound immigration policy has for our nation. I can assure the member that we will get it right in moving forward, whether it is this issue, the immigration numbers, and anything else.

• (1205)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Winnipeg North speak on this for 20 minutes, although I have to say it does seem longer. I have the same question as the Conservatives. What is the position of the government on this concurrence motion? Is it that the government is unwilling or unable to give us an answer whether it is going to be supporting this motion? It was debated in committee. We have heard 20 minutes of commentary from the member on it. Why is it that the Liberals cannot give us an answer on whether they will be supporting this motion?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the other day I referred to the “unholy alliance” where I see the NDP and the Conservatives more and more teaming up on their questions and so forth.

I have told the member and explained to the House that all good things will come to an end, and we will have a vote. I am intrigued that members across the way want to hear how I am going to vote on this and how government members will be voting. However, I look forward to the actual vote.

I have emphasized that, within the report, there are a number of recommendations that I have read through, and there are some very good, solid, sound ideas. I look forward to having that continued debate. I know that the current Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is very much on top of this file, and the minister recognizes the importance of immigration as a whole for Canada.

I believe that, in 2016, we had just under 300,000 immigrants, or something of that nature, and many would have used consultants. Therefore, we are concerned about the issue we are debating, which is one of the reasons, I believe, that a Liberal member of the standing committee wanted to have this particular debate at the standing committee and strove to have a report.

I compliment the committee, because on this particular issue we actually have all parties working together to come up with some recommendations. I look forward to the vote just as much as my colleagues across the way.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member from Calgary Shepard.

I rise to speak to an issue that, unfortunately, I have heard come up time and again in the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. It is an issue that I personally have seen happen far too many times. I have seen people misled and taken advantage of.

Routine Proceedings

I am thankful to have the opportunity to speak in this place today on behalf of my colleagues' concurrence motion.

The issue I am speaking about desperately needs to be addressed; that is, the effects of immigration consultants on immigrants coming to Canada. I have provided advice and possible remedies to many friends, family members, and constituents of mine, who had gotten wrong advice or been taken advantage of by phony immigration consultants. Moving to Canada is not an easy feat. I can attest to that.

Those who decide to come to our great country often leave everything behind in hopes for a better life and more opportunity. Yet for many, their first contact with Canada is not one we can be proud of, as many are exploited financially before they even arrive. I have heard horror stories.

The government should work to protect our immigrants from the damage that fraudulent or ghost consultants have on them. Rather than lip service, there need to be real regulations in place to ensure that immigration consultants are authorized and that people are protected.

We can all agree as Canadians that we hold ourselves to the highest standards when it comes to the quality of care our citizens and immigrants receive. However, there is a clear disconnect between what we want for Canadians and what is actually happening in our immigration system. I am pleased to speak to the concurrence motion presented by my colleague and bring light to the issues that our immigration system is plagued with and the Liberal government is continuing to dismiss.

Earlier this year, in March, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration began its study on immigration consultants. The motion to study this issue was adopted by the committee on Tuesday, October 4, 2016. This study lasted from March until June. Our committee heard from 50 witnesses and received 24 written briefs. The common theme held by a broad range of people was that more needs to be done to combat fraudulent and ghost consultants.

The final report was adopted by the committee on June 14, 2017, and was presented to the House in the following days. This report, titled "Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants", was unanimous, a report of cross-party collaboration in an attempt to find a real solution to negligent, fraudulent, and ghost consultants who are taking advantage of their already vulnerable clients. However, today we still do not see any meaningful action being taken by this government.

I heard a witness at committee on May 1, 2017, who stated that:

On April 23, 2015, I submitted a complaint to the Canada Border Services Agency in Toronto about a ghost agent that accepted several thousand dollars from an Australian citizen. The ghost agent informed the Australian that the case would be signed off on by a lawyer in Toronto.

However, the lawyer had never heard of the Australian citizen. Evidence of this violation was sent to the CBSA via email on more than one occasion. However, there was no action taken by the CBSA. The Australian was never contacted by the CBSA. The witness said, "It seems as if the CBSA has ignored the complaint."

●(1210)

Both the RCMP and the CBSA share responsibility for investigating authorized consultants who engage in fraud, and ghost consultants who operate outside the law governing immigration representatives. However, it is clear that further resources are needed for these units to sufficiently address the issue of fraudulent consultants. The ICCRC does not have any oversight over unregulated representatives. Instead, its authority lies with investigating misconduct and potential abuses by its members, who are the regulated consultants.

Why is the government allowing for the exploitation of vulnerable people, people who want to come to Canada to help make Canada better and to make a better life for themselves? Immigrants who look to Canada as a beacon of opportunity, who choose Canada to be their new home, do not have time to wait for the government to decide how it plans to combat this serious issue.

At committee, my colleagues and I heard a great deal of testimony on the damage that fraudulent and ghost consultants have done to new Canadians. While these bad actors are not representative of the industry as a whole, the committee heard of many possible changes that could be made to ensure better protection for newcomers. I heard testimony from various lawyers who said that section 91 of the IRPA needed to be amended to prohibit immigration consultants from providing advice or representation, because they are not held to the same ethical standards as lawyers, and that there are serious gaps in the disciplinary process of the ICCRC with the complaints it receives, and people are at risk.

The immigration lawyers shared their recommendations with the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. They said that the IRCC should launch an aggressive public education campaign detailing who may provide immigration advice and representation. This should include website-based links to provincial law society referral services and simple explanatory language on forms. A number of immigration lawyers recommended that section 91 of the IRPA be amended to allow individuals in non-governmental and community-based clinics to dispense immigration advice if supervised by a lawyer. Further testimony suggested that the most significant recommendation was for the government to create an independent body empowered to regulate and govern this profession. Ultimately, this would be a government-regulated body that would replace the current designation of the ICCRC as the industry's designated regulator.

We heard expert testimony, yet the advice is still not being acted upon. Instead, people continue to be taken advantage of.

Routine Proceedings

The government has recently released its response to the report tabled by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on this topic. However, the response was unsatisfactory at best. The Liberal government's response states that, "The Government expects to be able to provide more information on the way forward next year." This needs attention now. The current regulatory framework is inadequate at overseeing the actions of regulated consultants. This must be addressed. The ghost consultants, the unregulated representatives, are not being adequately pursued and prosecuted for their despicable actions. The government must do more to combat this. There are external factors, including a lack of adequate client services. We need to do more on this issue.

• (1215)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, for Canadians who have not had to deal with the department, or with consultants, sometimes described as vultures that flock around people who are desperately trying to apply to be in Canada and stay in here, it is the personal stories that matter. It is the experiences of good people who are qualified and meet all the standards our country sets out, who in the midst of that process essentially have it stolen from them by people who, as my friend said, do not have the ethics one would expect.

We had a gentleman in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Mr. Singh. He not only was contributing to our community, but was also the priest of the local gurdwara. He was very critical to the Sikh community in Prince Rupert, which is an isolated place where it is not always easy to attract clerics and people of faith to lead the congregation. He had hired consultants out of Toronto. I will not name them because they are the litigious kind. They said they would file the proper papers on his behalf. A year later, he found out they never did. He was now here illegally. I am working with the immigration minister, who did his best, but he unfortunately was deported back to India. The impact not just on him and his family, but the entire community was felt.

Could the the member comment on the need to disgrace these types of consultants and make it so they cannot do their nefarious work in our country.

• (1220)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Madam Speaker, I can tell a personal story. I have lived in this country the last 44 years. I have hardly gone back to India. I got a call from British Columbia a month ago. The caller said that I was his uncle, so I asked him to talk me. He said that his father and his great-grandfather were relatives. To make the story short, this kid was a 22 or 23-year-old student and someone offered him a job letter for \$20,000. He asked me if I could lend him the money. I told him that the \$20,000 was one thing, but that it was a phoney letter, that he was not going to go anywhere. I asked him where the job was and had he seen it.

Those people prey on these innocent souls. They try to convince them to bring them \$20,000, \$30,000, or \$40,000. To get \$20,000 cash, at \$14 an hour, that is one year's salary. At a \$28,000 salary, minus the taxes, they would clear \$20,000.

This is the issue, and it started back in the Chrétien/ Paul Martin times. It still goes on today. We need to work on it, and we need to work on it now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would suggest that it even predates that time. I was first elected in 1988. I have examples that go all the way back to that point in time. There are opportunities for exploitation and, sadly, there are mean-spirited people out there who have no problem at exploiting. That is one of the reasons why, whether it is in Ottawa as individual MPs or collectively as government, we need to take action. What are the member's thoughts on that?

Mr. Bob Saroya: Madam Speaker, I agree with my hon. friend. We need action, and we need it now. The report is ready. All of us, from all sides the House, agreed with the 21 recommendations at committee. I request my hon. friend and the immigration minister to act on it now. I am not talking about the recommendations sitting on the shelf, but about doing something now. People are getting ripped off every day.

From my 44 years of experience, I could write a book on the number of people who have been taken for a ride. People borrow on their credit cards. One of my clients, and I sent the information to the immigration minister and everyone else, was sent back home because he had run out of money. He went home, sold his house, came back, and it was still not enough. In the end, he was deported. It is a sad situation. The government can make it work.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join in the debate today. I would like to thank the member for Markham—Unionville for his contribution to the debate. I will paraphrase a Yiddish proverb that says, "Gray hair is a glorious crown won by righteous life". I see the member is just not there yet. He is working on it. I think he would agree that in his situation it is a good thing.

We find ourselves debating this concurrence motion partially because the government provided a response that said, "The Government expects to be able to provide more information on the way forward next year." It is interesting to note that the government will wait until next year to provide an answer to a report that was completed on June 14, and presented to the House. The report provides 21 pretty reasonable recommendations, so I want to approach this by providing a few points.

Like the member who spoke previously, I am an immigrant to this country. I came here when I was very young and so did my wife who came from Singapore.

I used to work for a professional association. A lot of the contents of the report deals with the relationship between a professional association that watches over its members on behalf of the public in the public's interest, like lawyers, notaries public, doctors. A lot of professions are self-regulated. Typically they have a statute that governs how their members are dealt with. The statute lays out rules for disciplinary action, a code of practice, a code of ethics, and the expectations of the profession while it undertakes work on behalf of the public. That is the way a lot of professional associations in Canada are regulated. The provinces regulate different professions.

Having worked for a professional organization and having worked for a minister of immigration in a previous government as well, those are the kinds of perspectives I want to bring to today's debate.

Routine Proceedings

The 21 recommendations before us and the report itself are pretty reasonable.

Recommendation 3 talks about the need for a regulatory body to develop, establish and require high standards for admission, including but not limited to, the areas of training, education, and a standardized curriculum across the provinces and territories. We are talking about the creation of a pan-Canadian profession with standardized rules for admission.

Some members have said that not all immigration consultants, not all persons involved in this new and emerging profession are bad. There are those who steal. There are those who, through theft or subterfuge, specifically target people who are trying to come to Canada or new arrivals in Canada who do not understand our immigration system.

I cannot blame them for not understanding the system. It has become more complicated over the last 30 or 40 years, and that is not the fault of the Liberals or the Conservatives. It has become more complicated because life has become more complicated. There are more regulations, more rules, and more exceptions.

All governments in general across all provinces have attempted to toughen up our system to ensure it is fair, just, and equitable toward persons who apply to enter Canada under different programs. We sometimes change our immigration programs. We provide different programs for work permits, economic class, express entry, and they all come with rules and regulations that are sometimes hard to navigate.

Then we have what I will call an emerging profession of immigration consultants who advise members of the public, new arrivals to Canada. We find ourselves in a situation where some people have leapt ahead of what the government is able to regulate. The 21 recommendations in the report are an attempt by a committee of the House to provide the Government of Canada with some observations, some proposals, and recommendations on how to reign in some of the more corrupt and vile practices out there, where people go out and steal.

Before I continue, I should mention that each of us as members of Parliament probably has a case file manager in our offices. I have two fantastic people who work for me, Connor and Sukhi. They do amazing work on behalf of my constituents of Calgary Shepard to try to process files. None of us would say that we do the work all by ourselves. We owe a great deal to our staff members, who figure out the rules as they go along. They meet with some of these consultants, some of whom are good and some of whom are bad. It is usually the bad ones who give us more work, because we have to figure out what went wrong, how did it go wrong, and then try to undo the damage that was done by these crooked immigration consultants.

● (1225)

Recommendation 4 states that the new regulatory body should have training and education standards, more rigorous than current standards, for those seeking to become immigration consultants. It brought me back to a May 5 email I received from one of my constituents, Daniel Brière, who is an immigration consultant registered with the RCIC. I met with him and he had some observations that tie in directly with these 21 recommendations. A

lot of what he wrote to me about I now find in the recommendations of the report we are now debating in the concurrence motion before us.

In my time at a professional association, having worked in human resources, I remember when HR was an emerging profession. In some provinces it is self-regulated and in some provinces it is not. It provides a designation that members of the public can achieve. There are educational standards and qualifications that have to be met. However, there is also a code of ethics to which people have to live up. That is a really important element of this.

I remember when I became the registrar for the human resources profession in Alberta. We had cobbled together six different associations to create one governing body to oversee human resources professionals in the province of Alberta. The parallel I draw here is that we introduced rules for disciplinary measures against members who violated the code of practice and the code of ethics. When we developed the code of ethics, we had a national code, set out by the CCHRA, which no longer exists as a national body. It has a different name now and different composition of what it does.

Volunteer members stepped forward and wrote a code of ethics and a code of practice. I was there to oversee the process as it was developed. At the end of the day, we always thought about one thing, and one thing only, and that was what we were trying to do on behalf of the public. That is what professionals do. That is what professionals are about. There will be that kind of behaviour until the proper rules are set by statute, which is recommendation 1 of the report, a single individual federal statute, that would govern this profession and basically give it the direction and tools it would need to govern its members.

We all have problems in our ridings with ghost consultants who will steal and cheat, but we should give the profession the right tools and statutory rules to discipline non-members, such as sending out cease and desist orders, which other professions have. The legal profession has this tool. The medical profession has this tool. Dentists have this tool. All professions do. Engineers have this tool as well. A member mentioned, too, engineers, the largest professional association in Alberta, with 70,000-plus members, have this tool. Therefore, those who are not members of the profession cannot pretend to be. It is the job of professionals and the professional associations to tell the public what to watch for, such as whether people are dealing with a professional or not.

Routine Proceedings

Here is where the problem exists with the RCIC as it currently exists and immigration consultants. It is really hard to tell whether one is dealing with someone who meets some reasonable standards of professionalism or someone who does not. A licence sometimes is just not enough when it is nicely framed, in French we call it *encadré*, on a nice piece of paper. However, it does not really convey that the person is a true professional and will have the organization's best interests in mind instead of its own financial interests. That is also important to take into consideration.

Some of the other recommendations proposed in the report talk about better coordination with other federal governing bodies. That is an important component. CBSA and RCMP have a role to play in all of this. Recommendation 21 states, "That the Government of Canada provide adequate, sustainable and targeted funding to CBSA to allow for an expanded ability to investigate and lay charges..."

Recommendations like recommendation 21 are perfectly reasonable. We should give CBSA the tools it needs to police the system. What more can be said? In our constituency offices, we all deal with situations where people have abused the system or individuals have lied on their applications, either the immigration consultants or the applicants themselves. We owe it to our constituents, ourselves, our staff, and constituency offices to concur in this report and vote in favour of the motion. I will be doing just that.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. He is absolutely right about how we are in an excellent position to see how these crooks endanger people's lives, take advantage of whatever they have left, mainly hope, and can damage our reputation.

The member was also right when he said that, although we may be familiar with the issues, it is experts like Vanessa Taylor in my office who repeatedly save people from being deported to their home countries. She has even saved people who were in the clutches of people who had abused their trust and good will.

This is where recommendation 10 could be very helpful. Recommendation 10 reads as follows: "That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada create a mechanism that will effectively allow individuals who have been abused by unscrupulous representatives to file a complaint without fear it will jeopardize their application or status."

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

• (1235)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert for his question. I will draw a comparison. When I was the director of the Human Resources Institute of Alberta, I was responsible for any disciplinary action that needed to be taken against our members. We had a disciplinary committee with a chair, which was a volunteer position, but I was an analyst on the committee.

The institute had developed a regulatory system to guide what we could do, how we would address cases of fraud, and how we could protect people when they were wronged by a business or employee, without the business or employee knowing about it.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am really glad that my colleague brought up the fact the recommendations in the report are pretty common sense and a good way forward.

Maybe my colleague could comment on the fact that many of us have had members from groups like the Canadian Bar Association, and some of the other law associations in Canada, come to us to say that the report has been tabled, the government has provided a response, but we are now in this period of limbo. The government really has not signalled to any of the groups that might be affected what will be done, and on what timeline.

Part of the reason for my moving this concurrence motion today was to give the government members an opportunity to vote and debate the report in the House, to show the rest of Canada that the House is unanimous in supporting these recommendations' going forward.

Could my colleague comment on the need for the government to perhaps elaborate a little more on the timing of the implementation of these recommendations, as well as how it will do that before Christmas, as opposed to after Christmas, and why that is important?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, the member for Calgary Nose Hill is absolutely right.

In its response to report 11, "Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants", the government states that it "expects to be able to provide more information on the way forward next year."

The member mentioned "limbo", but the only place limbo belongs is on a beach, with maybe a drink or two. It should not be part of government policy, especially when the House has provided recommendations to the government. The response cannot be "Sometime in the future, maybe in a year, we will provide to you our action plan." The House spoke, the House had a committee that determined unanimously that these 21 recommendations were reasonable, and the report was tabled here.

I think it is incumbent upon the government to treat members of Parliament, regardless of the party, with respect by providing us with a timeline, an actual response that we can study to see if the timeline is even reasonable. A year from now will be way too late, in 2018, or early 2019. There is an election coming, potentially in 2019. That could wipe out the work of this committee. There may not be any action taken then, because once it gets too close to an election, it eliminates the opportunity for action to be taken to stop these types of fraudster consultations.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish to share my time with my colleague, the member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Routine Proceedings

I may be a new member of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration who was not directly involved in drafting the report and recommendations in its study, “Starting Again: Improving Government Oversight of Immigration Consultants”, but the report is relevant to all 338 members of Parliament due to the nature of its contents.

Before I begin, I want to personally thank the member for Calgary Nose Hill for her tremendous leadership as the Conservative caucus’s shadow minister for immigration. She has been tenacious in holding the government to account, while also providing meaningful alternatives in everything the immigration committee does. For that, I congratulate her and am honoured to call her a colleague, as I am with regard to both of the previous speakers, my colleagues from Markham—Unionville and Calgary Shepard.

Before I got into politics at the provincial level in 1999 and then at federal level in 2013, I never expected the amount of immigration cases my office deals with daily. We heard the same from my colleague across the way from Winnipeg North. Even in western Manitoba, not traditionally known as the destination of many new Canadians, there has been a tremendous influx of immigrants who have decided to call west Manitoba their home. I would be willing to suggest that close to 50% of the people who call and visit my constituency office are seeking assistance with the immigration process. I suspect I am not alone in seeing this immigration caseload.

The mere fact that 50% of my constituency office’s work deals with immigration is perhaps a sign that we need to improve the service delivery of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. While that is a debate for another day, I am pleased that we are having a discussion today on the committee’s report regarding immigration consultants.

Individuals seek out the assistance of immigration consultants because the process is complicated, the wait times can be atrocious, and in many respects people are looking for guidance on the myriad forms they are expected to fill out. It is unfortunate that there are those in Canada who prey on vulnerable immigrants.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that this problem is not getting any better. Just this week in the news, a Winnipeg man was charged with illegally acting as a certified immigration consultant, which he most certainly was not. This is not the first time the CBSA has charged someone in Winnipeg with acting as an unlicensed immigration consultant. Just last year, an individual was charged for illegally supplying immigrant workers to restaurants, who were then coerced into giving back part of their paycheques to their employers. If this were not bad enough, another individual was charged for scamming more than 80 people into paying him thousands of dollars.

It must be said, this committee’s report was unanimous in its findings. In support, I certainly have other anecdotes from my own constituency that I could offer through my office from the files that we have deal with. That is why it is so important that we deal with these unanimous findings. It is very rare to have unanimous findings from parliamentary committees. It speaks volumes to the importance of getting the necessary recommendations moving.

The reason we are having this debate today is that the government’s response to the committee’s report was an injustice

to the 50 witnesses and dozens of hours put in by committee members and staff to provide the 21 recommendations to the government.

This report shines a beacon on the actions of unscrupulous immigration consultants. If we, for one moment, could put ourselves in the shoes of a temporary foreign worker who has been scammed by a crooked immigration consultant, we could get a better understanding of why the recommendations in this report are vital to cleaning up the industry.

Temporary foreign workers are vulnerable to begin with. They are far from home, come to Canada to work in a job that probably is not that glamorous, and then are taken advantage of because they have nowhere else to turn. The problem with immigration consultants is that while many follow the proper procedures of getting licensed and do provide meaningful assistance, there is very little one can do to stop others from printing business cards and portraying themselves as fully licensed consultants. That is why this report is so important.

● (1240)

I want to briefly go through some of the recommendations. The first is that the Government of Canada create an independent public interest body empowered to regulate and govern the profession of immigration consultants. The reason this recommendation is so critical is that previously, the tasks associated with governing consultants was given to an body outside of the government. While I am not one to suggest that the government needs to control every aspect of society, it is quite apparent that what we are currently doing is not working.

The Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council stated at committee that it receives over 300 complaints a year. The acting president of the regulatory council said that since it became the regulator six years ago, it has received over 1,710 complaints filed against consultants. Between 2010 and 2015, the active number of consultants in Canada has more than doubled. To put this into context, that is a significant number of complaints considering there are only 3,600 licensed consultants.

If we could just step back for a moment, we know that the number of complaints is probably far higher, as many immigrants are afraid of the repercussions that may arise from making a formal complaint.

The reason we should create a new independent public interest body is to maintain high ethical standards, preserve the integrity of the system, and protect applicants from exploitation and outrageous fees. The other thing an independent public interest body could do would be to set training, education, and experience standards before anyone could become an immigration consultant. The new regulatory body should also be empowered to investigate and deal with complaints in a timely manner. For these purposes, the new regulatory body should be provided with investigative and disciplinary powers similar to those exercised by Canadian provincial and territorial law societies.

Routine Proceedings

The other important aspect of the report is that not only would a new body be created, but there would also be a regular review by the House of Commons to ensure that it is meeting its objectives. There should be a mechanism that would allow individuals who have been abused by unscrupulous immigration consultants to file a complaint without fear of it jeopardizing their application process or the status of their applications. Furthermore, it is important that organizations that provide the most basic of immigration services be allowed to assist applicants without fear of sanctions. In this regard, I know firsthand the amazing work that Westman Immigrant Services does in Brandon, as it fills gaps and eases the transition of newcomers adjusting to life in Canada.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada should start working with organizations that provide immigration services to educate applicants about the new regulatory body to determine if a prospective immigration consultant is in fact legitimate. The era of back-lane immigration services and shady practices must come to an end.

In Canada we must demand more than what has been happening and think of the larger consequences for those who have been negatively impacted, and also for our reputation abroad. If we must increase fines and sentences for offences carried out by crooked immigrant consultants, then let us do it. Let us work with the RCMP and provincial and municipal law agencies to find new ways to deter these individuals from ever thinking of working outside the law again. I acknowledge that not everyone in the immigration consultant business is taking advantage of others, but for far too long we have turned a blind eye to this epidemic of deception.

The committee is a great example of co-operation across party lines in putting forward a great list of recommendations, and the government should adhere to its advice. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has done a great disservice by signing off on it with the most boilerplate response humanly possible, one that was clearly drafted by his officials. There was little evidence that the government and, in particular, the minister took any serious consideration of the report. Indeed, the government refused to take a stance on any of the recommendations.

In closing, I would like to say that we should not allow the report's 21 recommendations to collect dust in the minister's filing cabinet. For one moment, if we could put ourselves in a newcomers' position, think of what it must feel like to be taken advantage of, to be cheated and to be lied to and then to find out that one is being sent away through no fault of one's own, I believe we would all agree that the time is now to move forward and implement the committee's recommendations.

●(1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech full of goodwill.

Earlier he said that the government has not followed up on the unanimous recommendations at all. I would like to point out that this morning's debate is not about, say, forestry or fisheries. If it were, we would be talking about well-known cases that we are familiar with or have heard about, ones where we met with unions and advocacy groups. Today's subject is one we are very familiar with. We have

staff whom we supervise and who do a great job handling those cases. They are specialists.

Is my colleague hopeful that the government will actually pay some attention today and not ignore this as it did when the report was tabled?

●(1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that excellent question, because that is what this is all about.

There are 21 unanimous recommendations here from all parties on the committee, and that is why I am here today. I might have been a little harsh on the minister, but I think there is hope that the government will move forward with this. It is an excellent example of where it could move forward if there was a will to do so.

These 21 recommendations are certainly easily implemented, because a lot of them deal with training, education, and ethics. This is something I think my colleagues across the way will continue to look at.

One of the things in the letter from the minister to the chair of the committee I want to emphasize is that there are phrases here such as these: "The Government is seized with any issues related"; "The Government acknowledges that there is a strong need and commitment to ensure that" it moves forward; "the Government will carefully consider"; "The Government expects to be able to provide"; "the Government will continue to monitor"; and "the Government considers the recommendations".

These are nice phrases, but the government has not quite done the job yet. There is a real opportunity here to help the immigrant population that is moving to Canada.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is worth noting that we literally have hundreds of reports from standing committees, and this just happens to be one. We have a number of standing committees, and they do fantastic work. In those hundreds of reports, members can imagine how many recommendations there would be.

The Minister of Immigration and his department would be very much aware of the report. One should not make the assumption that if the House is not voting on a report, the ministry is not actually taking action on a report.

The same principle applied for Stephen Harper. When we have reports in committee, and there are literally hundreds of them, only a few will actually come to the fore for debate. It would be a wrong assumption to believe that there was no action being taken on a report, because some reports will never see the light in terms of debate inside the chamber. In fact, the vast majority will not.

I wonder if my colleague agrees with the assessment that it would be wrong to believe that nothing is actually being done on the file.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his observation. The member is quite right. A lot of committee work is excellent. There are a lot of good reports. They do not all come to the House. We are assuming that the minister will move forward, but when we look at actions without anything coming to the House, that is where the rubber needs to hit the road.

In this particular case, it is very important that this discussion is taking place, because a lot committee reports are not unanimous, but this one is. That is why we encourage the government to move forward with this particular report. It is because of the unanimity of all parties.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, being a consultant in this country is indeed a lucrative business. Do members know why? It is because there is a very weak regime for policing the consultants.

I want to thank the committee for bringing forward a very important issue and its recommendations to the House. I also want to thank my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill, and the government.

I agree with the previous speaker that because this is a unanimous report, it should be brought to the attention of the government. I do not agree with what the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader said, that there is so much work to be done that some of these reports will not be seen. I have been in government as well. It was unanimous, including members of his own party, that this issue needs to be corrected. It is a very small recommendation.

There is a full department of immigration. There is a Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship who can devote his time to dealing with it as quickly as possible. Why? It is because Canadians are demanding it.

I have been in Parliament for 20 years. For 20 years my office has been inundated with requests from newcomers. When someone comes to our office, and we cannot provide the services they need, we tell them to go to a consultant. That is what the consultant regime was set up for. When we advise them to go to a consultant, of course we do not recommend which consultant, because the consultants ask for money. However, more and more, newcomers are coming back to our office and telling us that their applications have failed, yet they paid the consultant so much money. If they paid so much money, why did the consultant not do his job properly? I have then delved more into the details, and I have found, shockingly, that the recommendations given by these consultants do not match what our immigration rules require.

Our immigration rules are very clear and are on the website. Nevertheless, many people will go to a consultant, because there is a sense of comfort that if they go to a consultant, they will get the right advice and may not miss something that will cause their file to be rejected. Unfortunately, the regime is so weak that anyone can become a consultant. We have ghost consultants. Anyone can say, "I am a consultant, and I will charge you this much money." That is why this matter was brought to the committee.

As my colleagues here, including the ones from the other side, have articulated so clearly, there is a need for quicker action on this. Just because these people are newcomers does not mean we should not have a sound regime in this country. This country is a rules-based

country. Our laws are rules-based, and we believe in the law. When we have a regime that is not regulating these unscrupulous consultants who are doing these things, we must come to the conclusion that there is a serious gap in our system that needs urgent attention. Therefore, I will tell the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader that it is important that he tell his government that it needs to look at this report more carefully, and urgently, because it is a unanimous report.

Based on my experience, this is what I like about the report. I love the specific recommendation for an independent body to regulate consultants that would have the power to deal with consultants who are cheating their clients or who are ghost consultants. This is one of the best recommendations, but it should have some teeth. The current regulatory board does not have teeth. That is why we see violations by more and more consultants.

• (1255)

My colleague from Calgary Nose Hill was right that the Conservatives, under our former colleague Jason Kenney, brought this issue forward. We have to admit that the problem with that was that while it was voluntary, it did not achieve the result, and it was misused.

This recommendation, after listening to all the stakeholders and everyone else, clearly states that there is a need for an independent body with teeth. If there are no teeth, this will become another bureaucratic institution, probably filled with patronage appointees.

Let us go back to the whole situation and say that we have experience. Someone asked how we do that. The law societies in Canada have regulations. Every professional body has means and ways by which to regulate itself and has the teeth to bring to account people who abuse their positions. I do not see why those same simple rules cannot be applied to this regulatory body. All it requires is for the current government to act on it very quickly.

I join with my colleagues in the House to ask if we could please have the minister look at it and address the issue, because while it may not be an issue for Canadians or new Canadians, we cannot have a gaping issue in our system that is being abused because people are not following the law. Numerous examples have been articulated by MPs of how their own offices are inundated with immigration issues.

The government just announced the next batch of over 300,000 people coming to Canada. While we cannot do much about the consultants overseas, who are also abusing huge numbers of people coming in, we can indeed use the website to advise them of the issues. However, those who are here in this country should have the ability to address those issues.

Once and for all, if this is done right, this issue will go away. A lot of the workload in our offices will decrease. As well, there will be a level of comfort that we can then say that the rules are being followed in our country.

Routine Proceedings

It is very important in immigration that the rules are followed. Every Canadian becomes upset when rules are not followed, as we can see with the people trying to come into our country and bypassing the rules. We have to have rules. A system without rules would not have the confidence of Canadians. That would be a matter of serious concern.

I am very happy to say that the committee came up with recommendations. If these were done, I would be one of the happiest men. This has come after a very long time. I congratulate everyone in the House. I congratulate the committee and all the members from all sides on the committee. We heard speeches in the House. It is unanimous that we want the government to take strong action in meeting the recommendations of the committee.

I will conclude by asking my friend, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, to please look at this. Let us get it done. Let us get this under way so that the regime of immigration in this country will get back on track and Canadians can have confidence in the system.

• (1300)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a rare day when reports are unanimously agreed to. It shows that this House can work constructively. We can approach issues in non-partisan ways. It is a rare day, and I congratulate the member for pointing out that this current weak regime, as he called it, was a mistake by the former minister, Jason Kenney. However, let us learn from those mistakes and move forward. We can actually work together constructively.

The member spoke of the weak regime and how lucrative this weak regime has become for crooked consultants. It has no teeth. Recommendation 18 calls for stiffer fines and sentences. I was just wondering if the member would like to speak to what he envisions. He has seen first-hand the terrible cases. What kinds of fines? How much should those fines be, in his opinion, and what kinds of sentences should there be?

• (1305)

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, first, I would like to tell my hon. friend on the other side, Jason Kenney was not wrong. We did nothing wrong. As a matter of fact, we started the process, and once we started the process it started evolving, and now it has evolved to the level where we are talking about recommendation 18, after the experience. However, it was not wrong. Jason Kenney did the right thing.

Coming back to his question about how stiff the penalty should be, we should start by revoking their licence. This regime should have a licence. We should give them a very clear warning that if they are going to abuse the system, they will lose their licence. If they become, as my colleague from Winnipeg said, a ghost consultant, as others have been charging, then we should bring them very quickly and effectively to court for working unlicensed. Whatever the penalties are for the other ones, that should be applied as well. However, of critical importance is the regime of enforcement, as he pointed out.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I always listen carefully to the remarks from the member for Calgary Forest Lawn. He has a lot of experience here,

and although we do not always agree, I find his contributions very valuable.

Like him, I often have my office feeling besieged by people desperate to deal with their immigration problems. It is peculiar today that we have had speeches from the Liberal side of the House where they have not clearly committed to supporting this concurrence motion. I find that very hard to understand.

I wonder if the member would agree with me that one of the problems we have now is that because the waiting lists are so long to get answers from Immigration Canada, it sometimes causes people who are desperate to reunite their families and deal with these problems to maybe take leave of their critical faculties when dealing with some of these corrupt consultants. I really feel these delays fuel this problem of bad consultants who are out there because of the desperation of people to solve these problems.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Madam Speaker, I concur with the member. Also, I thank him for the nice words he said about me. He has been a member there as well, so I have a high level of respect for his views as well.

Yes, there is no question the delays and everything in the immigration offices are fuelling desperation among people. When we tell someone it is going to take two or three years to get someone over here, or if someone wants to come for a marriage or something, the whole process and delays cause people to seek shortcuts. This is where the unscrupulous consultants use them.

I absolutely agree with my colleague that we should have a strong regime to ensure there is compliance.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in support of the concurrence of this report, approving the government oversight of immigration consultants. What I am not pleased about is the debate that I have heard today. Although every person on that committee supported the 21 recommendations in this report and they brought it forward 10 months ago, there is no evidence that anything has happened about that.

All day long we have seen members in the government talk about this and are not able to provide any evidence of whether they will support the concurring of the motion, let alone the 21 recommendations in the report. What a waste of the taxpayer money it is when people sit at committee, come with a reasoned report that everyone is in agreement with, and the government does nothing with it.

This is not the only case I have heard of. I was part of the pay equity committee where we put a special committee together in Parliament. We heard testimony. We took a lot of time. There was an extra cost to the taxpayer and what we heard there was that the Bilson report done in 2004, 12 years ago, was actually the answer. The recommendations in there that were unanimously supported at the time were the answer. We are still trying to fix this, but no action has been taken.

Routine Proceedings

It is very frustrating when I see that waste of taxpayer dollars. I also know that we have heard MPs on all sides of the House talk about how each one has nearly a full-time person in their office who spends time trying to fix up these screwed-up immigration issues. If we add that all up, that is a cost of \$150 million a year. That is a huge cost to the taxpayer to fix this.

I do not understand what is so difficult about fixing it when it seems that there are people walking across the border from Quebec and Manitoba who seem to be able to get their PRCs in a matter of days or weeks instead of the aggravation of years that we are seeing in these examples.

To illustrate the toll that this is taking on people's lives as new immigrants coming to Canada, I want to share some specific cases from my riding of Sarnia—Lambton. I will protect the identity of the people.

There was one fellow who worked in a global company and his company decided to transfer him. He was a citizen of New Zealand, but he was working in Australia and the company moved him from its office in Australia to its office in Sarnia—Lambton. He came with his wife and his son. The company at the time took care of all the immigration protocols, which was fine.

He was here for three years working away and then he decided to apply to be a Canadian citizen. He hired an immigration consultant. When I look at the files that are coming through my office in immigration that are screwed up and there are lawyers who have been involved in them, there are three lawyers' names who are probably responsible for 40% of the screwed-up cases that are coming through my office. I have recommended in every circumstance that people complain to the Bar Association about this, but to no effect. They continue to operate. They continue to impact lives.

Back to the story. The fellow applied and was refused by immigration saying that the initial papers filed originally when he first came here were not correct. The guy had been here for three years, working and paying taxes. His wife was working and paying taxes, his son was attending high school. He came to our office and we tried to help him and get the original papers from New Zealand and Australia that were required to remediate. Those were submitted and then the government came back and said it has been a year and a half, almost two years by the time it looked at this, now his labour market survey had expired and he would have to start with that again. We began to undertake that. That was done and submitted.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, there was a downturn in the economy and the guy was laid off. He received a deportation order. Of course this is ridiculous. These are law-abiding, tax paying, hard-working citizens, the exact kind of people that we want to have come to our country and help our economic growth. Of course I intervened with the minister. I intervened five times on this file alone and it was not fixed. When officials decided to deport him back to New Zealand it was the week after a big earthquake in New Zealand. We sent this guy back with no job to an earthquake disaster zone. This is the kind of toll we are seeing from consultants who get involved and screw up files.

● (1310)

It is just totally unacceptable. It seems to me that if the system is so complicated that people think they need to get a consultant in the first place, something that needs to be fixed. I really like recommendation 16, which states:

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada undertake a review of the use of consultants..., and develop a formal working group with members of the department and the new regulatory body to explore ways of simplifying its processes to reduce the need for third party assistance.

If it can be done for people crossing the border in the wink of an eye, certainly we must be able to simplify it so people can come and apply.

The other thing I want to say is that when it comes to foreign markets, I have had examples of people who have paid consultants in foreign places and have been totally ripped off for the money they paid, and have then been in our country and had to be deported at a huge personal cost there as well. Recommendation 14 speaks to that, and talks about educating and publicizing in these foreign places to make sure people do not think they need those consultants in order to come to our country.

I see my time is running out. I am very happy to support this, and I hope the government will take this seriously and take some action.

● (1315)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment Monday, December 4, 2017.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Monday, December 4, 2017, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

DAVIE SHIPYARD

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 52, I am asking for an emergency debate on the pending layoffs at the Davie shipyard.

On Monday, the House of Commons unanimously deplored the job losses at the Davie shipyard. The House must now act accordingly and take action. Not only are these layoffs tragic for the workers and their families, they also affect national security and operational capacity.

Last Thursday, the company announced that more than 160 workers and subcontractors had been laid off. If nothing is done, 350 employees will lose their jobs in the next 24 hours, meaning that, by the end of 2017, 800 people will have lost their jobs.

Davie shipyards represent 50% of Canada's shipbuilding capacity and have unparalleled and recognized expertise. For lack of federal contracts, they are not operating at full capacity. It is obvious that the loss of some 800 jobs in Lévis will result in the loss of irreplaceable expertise in Quebec and Canada and could even compromise Canada's national shipbuilding procurement strategy.

Canada has a single supply ship covering three oceans. We can all agree that this is clearly not enough. The Davie shipyard could build another vessel quickly and at low cost. The government has received two reports, one by the Standing Committee on National Defence and another by the Senate, that speak to a threat to national security and urge the government to acquire another supply ship.

We also do not have enough icebreakers. Winter has come. The government obtained an internal report highlighting the threat to the economy and to national security. We will recall that we have a free trade agreement with Europe and that it will increase traffic in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on the St. Lawrence River. We need icebreakers.

The Davie shipyard was not approached, even though it would have been prepared to help. It was prepared to quickly refit the four icebreakers at a low cost. The Government of Quebec supported this request. We just learned this morning that, because of the government's foot-dragging, the Russians beat Davie to the punch. Davie's running out of options.

Government Orders

Without Davie shipyards, Canada will lose 50% of its production capacity at a time when both the Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Navy have pressing operational needs. We must act now before it is too late, and that is why this debate cannot wait.

We are therefore asking you to consider this request for emergency debate by taking into account the fact that, as I said before, 350 people are going to lose their jobs in the next 24 hours, bringing to 500 the total number of people who will have lost their jobs this week. This is our only opportunity to consider the layoffs at Davie shipyards since the issue is not currently on the parliamentary agenda and will not be before the jobs are lost. This is not a matter of privilege. It is a national emergency.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is the only opportunity the Bloc Québécois has to raise this issue. I am therefore asking you to grant an emergency debate this very evening.

● (1320)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Repentigny for her remarks. I listened to her arguments and find that, in this case, they do not meet the criteria and requirements set out in the Standing Orders.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

INDIAN ACT

The House resumed from November 29 consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act (elimination of sex-based inequities in registration).

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to continue debate on a bill from the Senate, Bill S-3, an act to amend the Indian Act with the elimination of sex-based inequities in registration.

Prior to doing so, I would like to translate for those watching at home on CPAC what happened just prior to this debate, in which the House was engaged in a three-hour conversation about the problems facing immigrants to Canada, and the consultants that sometimes prey on them. It was debate on a report that came out of our committee in which there was unanimous support for the recommendations. At the end of that three-hour debate, we watched the Liberals express their opposition to a unanimously accepted report proposing a crackdown on bad immigration consultants, and then force a vote later next week to vote against it. Does anyone watching actually understand the Liberal motivation behind that particular manoeuvre? I am sure that many of my Liberal colleagues cannot explain it, but maybe somebody else out there can.

Government Orders

Returning to the bill, because this has been some time in coming, I want to first acknowledge the incredible and heroic work of my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. I do not use the word “heroic” often or lightly. However my colleague, for much of his life, being a first nations person by his very birthright but more so by his decision and inclination, has tirelessly fought for the rights of indigenous peoples in this country, in Quebec, at the United Nations, and around the world. He is one of the leading voices in this country speaking about the rights, the responsibilities of the government, the tragedy, the multitude of errors, and the racist legislation and policies that have emanated from this exact place, this room, for generations against the first peoples of this country.

My colleague has been determined. He has been incredibly articulate, and it is his opinion, along with those of the people who first brought this case, upon which I will rely this afternoon, in terms of my concerns for this bill, Bill S-3.

Not only my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou is opposed to this legislation. So are the proponents, the lady warriors who litigated this case for four decades, who remain opposed to this legislation. Their letter to the Minister of Justice states that:

Our reading of the motion introduced by Senator Peter Harder in the Senate on November 8, 2017 is that we, and the many Indigenous women who are similarly situated, will not be accorded 6(1)(a) status when Bill S-3 passes.

I will get into what “accorded 6(1)(a) status” means, but suffice it to say that the intention of this bill to remedy a racist and sexist policy of the federal Government of Canada will not be carried out in full by the passage of this legislation. Nor has the consultation, which was promised by this government in arriving here today, been done. The minister herself admitted embarrassment and shame at the lack of consultation that she and her government promised and failed to do.

We can understand why it would be difficult for first nations peoples, having had many experiences of their hopes being raised and false promises being made, to return back to the same old saga again, where the federal government in Ottawa says it will get things right and talk to them to make sure they are right, and the next thing the government does is nothing. The government did not talk to the first nations, include them, or bring in their wisdom. Rather, at the eleventh hour in this case, the government brought forward a piece of legislation and admitted it did not consult anybody, admitted it was bad, but said we are out of time and we need to pass the bill now, and it will do the trick.

It is not going to fix the problem, in whole. That is according to the people who first litigated the case. I trust them more than anybody else.

• (1325)

Let us start with first principles, the Indian Act, a colonial, racist piece of legislation that was created at the founding of this country, which the Prime Minister himself admits is colonial, racist, and sexist in design. That is what we are amending here today.

We are amending a racist piece of legislation, a sexist piece of legislation, a colonial piece of legislation to make it slightly better, not entirely better, not even better for all of the women and their

descendants who are affected by its sexism, but just for some of them and only going back to 1951. People who were affected prior to 1951 and their descendants are not touched by Bill S-3 at all. They will not be deemed into new status. They will not be deemed to be aboriginal, when they are.

Only a federal government that says it believes in nation-to-nation dialogue, only a federal government that says that self-determination is important but then when it comes down to the question of who one is, what identity one is, remains in control of that decision and says that Ottawa knows best, that it will decide who are and who are not first nations, which is a continuation here in this bill.

Let us walk back, because it is important how we arrived here. It was not some great government benevolence that said this terrible piece of legislation discriminates against first nations women, which it did and does. Let us find out how.

There are two classifications for status. Through the course of this discussion I am loath to use the word, but the word is applied in law, and this is the word we have to use, because we are talking about the Indian Act. Indian status is described in the “Indian” Act. This name and this word was applied by Europeans to the first peoples here because they thought they were in India, because they thought that when they left Europe and arrived on our shores, they were in India. They were looking for the secret passage to India to enable the spice trade and other things that Europeans at the time were interested in, 350 to 400 years ago.

In 2017, we still use the term in our legislation to describe the first nations people of this country as Indians. Imagine how offensive this is to first nations people listening to this debate, the first nations people who continue to live under the Indian Act in the prescription of basic government services that the rest of the country enjoys without the racist terminology being applied.

Imagine if non-first nations Canadians had legislation using racist terminology to describe them, like immigrants from my home country of Ireland and all the racist epithets that were used against my people for years. If that were written into law and I went to apply for medical or dental or education benefits, I would have to apply under a terminology of law that was inherently racist against my people. We continue with this public secret. We continue to walk with this and say that we have evolved and acts like this will make it better.

When we ask the government if it wants to do nation-to-nation relationships, if it wants to do reconciliation, that when it listens to the current chief of the Assembly of First Nations say time and time again that the Indian Act is a colonial, race-based piece of legislation that we must end, that we need an exit strategy, as he calls it, the government replies by saying “there go the first nations leaders and the NDP again saying to get rid of the legislation”. Of course we should get rid of the legislation.

Government Orders

Who else would survive under this legislation happily? What other ethnic group, particularly a group that was here first, since time immemorial, would happily live under legislation that was inherently racist in its design, in its application, and in its use? Would Polish Canadians happily suffer under that? Would Canadians from Caribbean communities happily suffer under racist legislation in name and application?

Under the Indian Act, section 6(1) determines that if both parents are of first nations status, the child will be first nations. Section 6(2) says that if one person has status and has a child by another person who is not first nations, that child will only continue to be first nations if the male parent was first nations, but if it was a first nations woman who had a child with a non-first nations man, that child is no longer first nations. That is what we are attempting to address today.

● (1330)

This was true up until the 1970s and 1980s. Children of first nation parentage were denied their status under the law because their mom had the audacity to choose who would be her partner. A woman in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s had to make a decision. If she fell in love with someone who happened to be non-native and had children with that person, her children could never be first nation. They could not be a member of their local first nation in voting. They could not be a member of their local first nation in celebration. They could not be a member of their local first nation in terms of government programs that were applied to them and their parents. This is sexism, if one's progeny are determined by whether one is a woman or a man. It is discriminatory.

However, it was not the government that decided to make a change, but the courts. In this case, the Quebec Superior Court said to the Government of Canada in 2015, all those many years ago, this is discriminatory. This is against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Canada where we cannot discriminate against someone based on their sex. It took until 2015 for this to be resolved in court. However, it was not resolved. All the court can do is say that this part of the law is wrong, that it infringes on the rights of Canadians, and that it must be struck down and replaced with something, which happened in August 2015.

What did the then federal government do under former Prime Minister Harper? He appealed and said that he disagreed with the court's findings. He disagreed with the idea that we cannot make a determination about someone in this country based on their sex, disagreed that it is unconstitutional, and said he would appeal it. We were going to spend more taxpayer money, and hundreds of millions have been spent over the years fighting aboriginal rights and title in court, to fight for the principle, according to the former government, that the children of first nation people should be first nation or not depending on the sex of the parent.

The Quebec court said that we must change the law, Canada appealed under the former government, and then a new government came in and dropped the appeal. The courts do not care which party is running the Government of Canada, and it uses the term "crown". These terms come back from our past. We are a colonial offshoot. The court said that the crown must remedy this and had 18 months to do so. It seems reasonable to me to have 18 months to consult with

people, and if changes would be made to the Indian Act, they could be made in the most fulsome and proper way possible. It may be a good idea, in those 18 months, if the government of the day consulted with the women who first brought forward the case 40 years ago and who are still active.

However, 17 months later, with a month to go, the government pops up with Bill S-3. Amazingly, as the Liberals brought forward this legislation, they were challenged on it, because any fixes to this act are important, particularly to the people who might be affected. When the minister in charge of this was first commenting on it, this is what she said:

The Government is also exploring various opportunities and approaches for engagement with First Nations and other Indigenous groups on necessary legislative changes, and more information on this will be forthcoming

That sounds good: we are going to consult. However, a year later at committee she is asked how the consultations went. Here is what she said:

My department's failure to directly engage with the plaintiffs was not only unacceptable but embarrassing for me as minister.

There was a promise that they were going to consult to fix this, but a year later, the Liberals are embarrassed and call it unacceptable. To my mind, "unacceptable" means that one does not accept something. However, clearly it is acceptable, because here is the legislation.

Imagine the personal sacrifice of the plaintiffs, the women who fought for this over four decades. For 40 years, without money and political support, they fought for a principle, for the right not to be treated unfairly under a racist piece of legislation. The government did not bother to talk to the women who were involved, but those women have come forward and said, as I noted at the start of my speech with, that Bill S-3 did not remedy the problem they had first fought for in court.

● (1335)

What is going to happen with this legislation? I suspect that the Liberals will vote for it. It will get challenged and go back to court. It will start at the lower court, work its way up, probably to the Quebec Superior Court or the Supreme Court, with the government of the day spending more taxpayer dollars challenging its version of events, that this change should only go back to 1951, that that is good enough and we should accept it. We are going to repeat the errors of history.

I recall the apology to first nations in this place on behalf of the Government of Canada by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. It is important to remember that with any of the apologies, even the one recently to the LGBTQ community, it is not the Prime Minister himself who is making the apology; it is the Government of Canada. It is the Parliament of Canada expressing regret and begging forgiveness in some cases for the mistakes made by previous governments, whatever their political stripe. It really does not matter who was in charge at the time.

Government Orders

The apology for the residential school travesty was warmly accepted by first nations people in the riding I represent in northwestern British Columbia. Despite years of oppression and oppressive legislation, there was an opening of the hearts of the people whom I represent, to say that in the face of all the harm done to them over the many years, they understood that the government now recognized that it was wrong, and they accepted our apology. I thought that was true until the government at the time that had made the apology cancelled the Aboriginal Healing Foundation two months later, which had been established to help the survivors of residential schools deal with the trauma of residential schools. What does an apology mean if one's next act is to continue the same thing one was apologizing for?

I was recently in a remarkable community in my riding, a place called Bella Coola. The Heiltsuk people have lived in Bella Coola forever. It is an incredible valley. It has glaciers and mountains and a massive river that is causing all sorts of concerns given climate change. The Heiltsuk had been living there and growing an incredible culture. On the way to the local school with the local chief councillor and another councillor, there was this beautiful plaque with a great first nation symbol on the front and beside it, many names. The names are of all the residential school survivors from that community, all of the children who were taken from their parents over decades. Their names are enshrined in the wall to remind the children who were not taken from their parents of what happened before.

The chief councillor went to the wall, pointed to his own name, and said he was taken when he was five. He pointed to the name right above his and said it was his mother's name, who was taken when she was six. He said he only found out that she had even been to a residential school when this plaque was unveiled. I asked what he meant, and he said she never talked about it and the community never talked about it. The shame was so incredibly great that only during the ceremony honouring the victims did he find out that his mom had been through the same horror he had been through. I asked when he had told his kids that, and he said it was when he was 53, when he was right enough to be able to talk to them. It is hard to understand of impact of it, as a father, of having my kids taken by another culture and government and then beaten, raped, and oppressed. The emotions are powerful.

When we look at opportunities like this to do away with the continued practice of racists and oppressive legislation, the bare minimum of decency requires that we talk to the people who have been oppressed. The bare minimum of intelligence is to use the wisdom and understanding of those most affected. Bill S-3 does not do that. The government chose not to do that. It admits embarrassment and shame now, but it is not good enough. If it is going to do something and wants to rebuild a relationship, then it should do it. It should do it with integrity and not keep issuing apologies and continuing to do things that it will have to apologize for again in the future. First nations deserve better. This country deserves better.

● (1340)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank

the member opposite for his contribution to this debate. I know that he, like many of us in this House, wishes that we were standing here today to repeal the Indian Act, and not just amending it. We all know the flawed legislation that this country has had for dealing with its indigenous people over many years.

One of the challenges for a government is that just repealing this act in the absence of other legislation would be very difficult. I know the member likes to talk about this being an issue of great government benevolence, but realistically court case after court case in this country occurred without the government acting, with the entire legislation being ignored.

What we are doing is correcting sex-based inequities with this legislation. We would ask the members to support the work of our government, to work with us on this difficult road that we are on to ensure that all rights of indigenous people are taken into consideration.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, to be clear, any insinuation that the New Democrats are not willing, with full heart and mind, to work with the government to correct the terrible atrocities that have been committed in the past is incorrect.

What my colleague just said is not true. This legislation seeks to set a limit on correcting the sex-based discrimination of 1951. She shakes her head no, but it is true. The women who advocated for this case, the warrior ladies, have said that if it is passed in its current form, it will not apply to them. It will not apply to their circumstances. That should give the government some pause.

Is the government going to suggest to us that it knows better than the women who have been fighting this case for 40 years, that Ottawa knows best rather than the women who have experienced and had to live with this racist legislation? Now, ministers of the crown are going to sit here and say they are wrong. Government did not consult with them, which the minister admitted, to her embarrassment. The government did not consult and it should have. She is embarrassed. Government did not consult. I wrote the legislation. It got it wrong, and the women are pointing it out.

For anyone to sit on that side of the House and say these women are wrong, I would dearly invite them to a conversation with these brave ladies who have fought so hard for basic, fundamental justice.

● (1345)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have addressed this topic before.

I talked about an old car that is well worn out but that needs a wheel bearing. Should the new wheel bearing be put in a really old car, or should one just go to town and buy a new car? That is really what it feels like this. The member addressed that at the beginning of his speech.

One of the other things I noticed about this piece of legislation is the unique circumstances of its passage. For example, messages were sent from this place to the other place, and then back again. I am a new member and this is the first Parliament I have participated in, and I know that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has been around here longer than I have.

Government Orders

Could the member comment on the process of the passage of this bill, and if it is unique from his perspective?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, I do not claim any great expertise in parliamentary history as to where and when bills originate from and what the problems are.

I will say this. There seems to have been a growing trend, particularly in the last Parliament, of clear government legislation being written and sent from the Senate. The legislation is drafted by the government, not by the Senate.

I do not know the intricacies of this particular bill and, as the member said, of the messages back and forth. When a government needs to bring forward legislation, no government should want to pat itself on the back and say “Look how wonderful we are”, when the Superior Court in Quebec demanded that it draft the legislation.

The idea of bills coming through the Senate seems to me, as a democrat, a problem. The government is pretending to originate its legislation with unelected and fundamentally unaccountable legislators, the senators. They are not elected by anyone. They cannot be fired by anyone, really. As it turns out, that it is very hard to do.

It is the House's duty, the government's duty, to author legislation for which it is responsible, not to pass the buck to the Senate and have it do it for the government.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member talked about everything coming from Ottawa, Ottawa knowing best, and the paternalism that exists with that. I have the Mohawks of the Bay of the Quinte in my riding. They have expressed deep concern around this bill in that they want to choose who the members of their community are going to be. They are very concerned that Ottawa is once again becoming paternalistic in trying to throw the doors wide open to include all members.

I would caution the member not to take this too far. We do need communities to define who their members are going to be, and to have them directly involved in every step of the way in the bill, as it is worded, taking the time over the next number of years to ensure we get this right so the communities themselves are setting those priorities.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, I take my friend at his word, and the notion of nation-to-nation implies a certain respect and capacity for self-determination. The self-determination of identity must be the most basic form of self-determination we have. My friend identifies himself as a sovereign person, not for me to impose on him who I think he is. In his community that is also true, but that is not true for first nations people. The Department of Indian Affairs has done that since the inception of our country, to say who is first nations and who is not. If their mother got together with a non-native guy, not only are they not first nations, but anyone who descends from them is not as well. It does not matter if they are raised in the community, speak the language, enrich themselves with that deep culture, it does not matter, Ottawa will determine it. That continues today.

This legislation goes back part of the way but stops in the 50s. As for those affected before that and descended from those people, Ottawa will continue to determine they are not first nations,

regardless of who they think they are and who they know themselves to be.

The ability to define who we are, individually and within our communities, lies at the heart of this. Our friend used the broken car analogy. The Indian Act is so much worse than that. South Africa came here to study the reserve system when it was looking to establish apartheid in South Africa. It is not a coincidence, it is a disgrace, and it should highlight for us how bad and inherently rooted this is in this institution. In order to get it out it is going to take at the least the amount of effort that was put in to oppress first nations people for so many decades.

• (1350)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to give the member an example from Vancouver Island that is even more egregious. We have 13 nations that make up the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, along with Ditidaht and the Hupacasath. Their cousins, Wakashan speakers, are Makah in Washington State, and when a woman married someone who was a non-status Indian in Canada, but was a Wakashan speaker in the United States, their cousins, they lost their status. The same is true in my riding of the Coast Salish people from the Songhees, Esquimalt, Scia'new, and the South nations. They have cousins living on the other side of the border. They are not literally cousins, but language families. If a woman married into those nations, she lost her status in Canada, whereas a man did not. It does not even have to be a non-native. It was a non-status person.

We have people who are very concerned, but I have to differ with the other member. All the people I have talked to in these nations have said we should change the law and they will make those decisions themselves.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, there are a lot of conversations that go around the issue that ask when first nations are going to get their stuff together. My answer back to those folks is, “How about we work our side of the hyphen first between native and non-native relations?”. When we still enforce racist, colonial, sexist legislation it is a bit rich for us to turn to first nations people and ask, “What's your problem exactly and why can't you figure it out?”

The cases he raised are similar in my part of the world because the Haida, for example, were the Haida, then suddenly, Russia sold Alaska. They dropped down a division and the Haida of Canada became Canadians and the Haida of Hydaburg became Americans. If they married one way or another they were under threat of losing who they were as a person. How ridiculous and ignorant is that? If we want to fix this, let us fix it, but let us fix it right.

Statements by Members

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments we have heard in regard to the importance of Bill S-3. When the Prime Minister was leader of the third party a number of years ago, he made it very clear in terms of trying to establish a relationship of respect. The idea of it being nation-to-nation is something the Prime Minister embodied. He made it part of what members of this government caucus and my Liberal colleagues have also embraced, recognizing the many historic tragedies and wrongs that have been put upon people who really did not deserve it.

To that extent, we have before us legislation that looks at making a significant change and making sure there is a higher sense of equality. There is the broader issue that needs to be addressed and that is talking about the relationship and the need for us to move forward.

I represent Winnipeg North and I have the honour and privilege of representing many people of indigenous background. I am very proud of that fact. I like to think that one of the strong characteristics of Winnipeg North is the very high sense of indigenous heritage we see when we drive down many of our community streets. I suspect that we have a high percentage of volunteerism coming out of the indigenous community.

There is one in particular. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata is an organization that has done so much for first nations and Métis over the years, advancing many different causes. We want to address some of those needs. I have spoken in the House on many occasions dealing with indigenous issues. I have consistently said that we should be encouraging government and all members to enable strong indigenous leadership and supporting that in whatever way we can. The first nations communities' acceptance of us as a whole should never be underestimated in terms of its importance and contributes to who we are as a nation today.

Earlier I had the opportunity to talk about immigration and I said we are a country of immigrants. We all know first nations and Inuit were not immigrants. They were the individuals who had been farming and using this beautiful land that we call Canada as home for thousands of years. Through time, we came to this land and through many different initiatives, communities have built it up to become a wonderful and many would argue the best country in the world. Having said that, we need to recognize our first nations, Inuit, and Métis for the fine work that has been done and will continue to be done. We need to demonstrate respect. Through the Prime Minister's commitment that this is priority issue, we want to further this nation-to-nation relationship. That is fantastic to see.

● (1355)

We have a government that has taken tangible action also. We have given historic amounts of money to attempt to address many of the issues. I was so impressed when the Prime Minister made the announcement that we were going to split the department into two, where our former minister of health would now be responsible for indigenous services. I think that was exceptionally well received. If we look at the need and desire of indigenous people to become more independent, and the need to have a better understanding of the realities taking place in their daily lives, it is of critical importance

that we act in a more expeditious way. Therefore, designating a minister who is responsible for looking at those services is a positive and wonderful step forward. We have seen a government that has not only talked passionately about the importance of education but has also invested in education for indigenous people. I believe we need to equate education with opportunities. We know if we invest in education, that individuals will grow because of that education, whether elementary, secondary, or post-secondary, and it will provide more opportunities in the future. There are many wonderful initiatives that the government has already taken.

I take it my time is running out. I look forward to continuing my comments at the end of question period.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have 13 minutes the next time this matter is before the House after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, it was reported yesterday that French continues to decline in Canada and Quebec as the primary language of work.

As usual, Statistics Canada is trying to cover up the decline by claiming that the use of French at work is increasing alongside the use of English. That is like saying, "Heads, I win; tails, you lose".

It should be obvious that if French is declining, it is because English is taking up more space, to the point of practically taking over, as is happening in the rest of Canada. Like everywhere else in the world, institutional bilingualism causes minority languages to be assimilated.

In order for French to thrive, it needs to be the common language in regions with a critical mass of French speakers, starting with Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois will continue to pressure Canada to stop imposing institutional bilingualism on Quebec. Its refusal proves that the only way to ensure the promotion—

● (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

* * *

MOVEMBER

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Movember.

I am inspired by the member for Sudbury, the thousands of youth I have worked with throughout the years, and my son.

Statements by Members

Movember is an initiative that supports boys and men who are afflicted by prostate and testicular cancers, as well as those who face mental health challenges. I want to offer my gratitude to all those who have supported this amazing initiative, one sits beside me here on my right.

Mental health stigmas are detrimental to young men who want to tough it out and not risk their masculinity by admitting this perceived weakness. My message for them is that they are not weak for having a mental illness; they are strong for acknowledging it.

For the boys and men suffering who are silently suffering, I want them to know we care, we want them well, and we love them.

* * *

BLOOD DONATION

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Christmas season is upon us. Canadians everywhere are starting to race around to find the perfect gift this year. The best gift we can give is the gift of life.

Blood is always in short supply at this time of year, and many lives depend on a steady supply of blood donations. I am a blood donor, and I am sponsoring a blood drive on Tuesday, December 19 at the Eau Claire blood donor clinic in Calgary. Those able to donate to give the gift of life can call my Calgary office to book an appointment.

I encourage all Canadians to take the time to donate blood this season. It is the perfect gift. It is the gift of life.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Parkdale—High Park have spoken to me repeatedly about housing. They have told me that after a 25 year absence, the federal government needs to re-engage. They have said to me that housing is foundational, that when we solve housing needs, it gives Canadians a better chance at good health and at educational and economic success.

[*Translation*]

We listened to our constituents and responded with the national housing strategy. This strategy focuses on our most vulnerable citizens, including veterans, seniors, indigenous persons, survivors of domestic violence, and people dealing with mental health and addiction issues.

[*English*]

It is a strategy that will inject \$40 billion into housing, will build 100,000 new units, and repair 300,000 more, a strategy which will reduce homelessness by half in 10 years. Most important, it is a strategy that will entrench housing as a human right. That is the kind of protection the constituents in Parkdale—High Park, and indeed all Canadians, deserve.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Great Lakes are the largest surface freshwater system on the Earth, and the health

of the Great Lakes in my riding of Essex is in serious danger. Last September, Lake Erie saw a dangerous growth of algal bloom that landed on the shores of Colchester, closing it down for an entire week to the public.

These bacterial blooms produce a toxin which is extremely harmful to swimmers, boaters, and local wildlife. Because of this crisis, the member for Windsor West and I held a tri-level round table with researchers from the University of Windsor, who expressed the need to work diligently to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

Today the International Joint Commission, in its first triennial assessment of progress under the 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, called on the government to set specific timelines and targets for making critical improvements. It is imperative we take immediate action to avoid additional harm and contamination. That is why I have asked the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to initiate a long-term study and assessment plan to protect this fragile ecosystem.

Essex is surrounded by Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair. The health and vitality of our Great Lakes are instrumental to our sustained economic growth, environmental stability, and safe drinking water in our region.

* * *

● (1405)

WORLD AIDS DAY

Mr. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, December 1, marks World AIDS Day, a day to show support for individuals living with and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Over many years, Canada has made great strides in the response to this public health challenge. We have strengthened our front-line community and public health capacity to educate people about how to prevent infection. We have also worked to reduce stigma by supporting the establishment of more supportive environments to enable individuals to come forward for testing and improve the quality of life for those living with HIV.

In 2015, Canada endorsed the global targets for the elimination of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections by 2030. The Government of Canada is working with provinces, territories, first nations, Inuit and Métis communities, and all stakeholders to develop a way forward that will help Canada achieve these global targets. This year alone, the Government of Canada is investing more than \$87.8 million to reduce the impact of HIV and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections in Canada.

Today, I invite the members of the House to join me in wearing a red ribbon to recognize the important work of those dedicated to addressing the challenges of HIV and in honour of those who have lost their lives to AIDS.

*Statements by Members***FEAST OF ST. ANDREW**

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to celebrate a deeply respected institution and to pay tribute to a man, whose life is distinguished by sacrifice, selflessness, and service.

Today is the feast of St. Andrew, the patron saint of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Patriarchate is the centre and highest See of the Orthodox Church, led by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. He is the spiritual leader of the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians.

Despite facing religious persecution, His All-Holiness perseveres to promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

On behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada, I send warmest wishes to His All-Holiness Bartholomew and the hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christians across Canada for the joyous feast of Saint Andrew.

* * *

JEWISH REFUGEE DAY

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we commemorate Jewish Refugee Day. I specifically want to call everyone's attention to some forgotten refugees, the approximately 850,000 Jews who had to leave Arab countries and Iran due to religious persecution.

Their families lived in these countries for many centuries, but in the years leading up to and following the establishment of Israel, anti-Jewish sentiment and violence dramatically increased.

[*Translation*]

In some of these countries, Jewish communities faced organized killings and systemic violence. Many countries stripped them of their property and revoked their citizenship.

[*English*]

Countries that had Jewish communities in the hundreds of thousands today only have a handful of Jewish residents, and willingly or unwillingly, their Jewish communities found refuge in Israel and in western countries like Canada.

I ask all my fellow members to join with me and those Jewish Canadians who found refuge from Arab lands and Iran in commemorating the experiences they lived.

* * *

SENATE 150 MEDAL

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize an outstanding elder and community leader from Enoch First Nation in Alberta. Irene Morin has advocated tirelessly for important community causes for the past 56 years.

Despite her official retirement in 2016, Irene still shares her considerable talents with organizations such as the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and the 23rd annual Aboriginal Role Models of Alberta Awards, which she chairs.

Irene is in Ottawa this week to receive a Senate 150 medal from Senator Mitchell in recognition of her outstanding leadership and dedication to indigenous peoples. She is joined by her granddaughter Alyssa Morin-Arcand who is already following in her kokum's footsteps and is involved in her community.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking and congratulating Irene Morin.

Mamihcimowewin

* * *

ENERGY SECTOR

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the people who work in Alberta's energy sector, who have made Canada's resources the most reliable and environmentally sustainable in the world.

Canada is a leader in energy, but the world currently has very limited access to our resources. Canadian companies have spent billions trying to build new pipelines to tidewater, but the government has held them back. This leaves us with only one choice, which is to sell our products to the United States at discounted prices.

Energy east and northern gateway pipelines, as well as the Pacific NorthWest LNG project, have been cancelled under the government's watch. These projects would have created tens of thousand of new jobs, added hundreds of billions to Canada's GDP, and resulted in tens of billions of dollars in new government revenues that could have been used to build hospitals, schools, and roads in every community across the country. However, all of that has been lost.

It is time that the government quit attacking the energy sector and build prosperity in communities like mine.

* * *

● (1410)

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to thank the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada for their leadership in delivering on a long overdue promise to bring closure to many other indigenous people in Canada by apologizing to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador who were former residential school survivors. Most Canadians received this apology in 2008. However, the residential school survivors of Newfoundland and Labrador were left behind.

Last week, on behalf of the Government of Canada, the Prime Minister apologized to these residential school survivors in our province. The survivors from Nunatsiavut, NunatuKavut, and Innu Nation received what was a true apology as part of our ongoing reconciliation process in Canada.

For many of the people in the room that day, and watching at home, this closed a dark chapter and finally began a healing process. I want to acknowledge and congratulate all those who fought hard for this to happen.

YELLOW BRICK HOUSE

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the idea of a safe place was born in my community of Richmond Hill back in 1978. Within 24 hours, the Yellow Brick House, once attached to Dr. Crawford Rose's clinic, went up for sale, and a home was made for children and women in crises. Frustrations were turned into hope, when passionate and dedicated friends and neighbours joined together to paint, clean, and gather furniture, appliances, books, toys, and clothes.

Holding and nurturing those values, the Yellow Brick House non-profit organization has served and supported 5,581 abused women and children across York region to date.

On November 25, I had the honour of launching the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, alongside the Yellow Brick House, staff, volunteers, and donors. I am honoured to share their story, and to shine light on their incredible work today in the House.

I encourage my colleagues in the House to take concrete steps to question, call out, and speak out against acts of violence today and every day.

* * *

NOVEMBER 30

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is a historic day. November 30 marks the 530th anniversary since the German beer purity law was passed by Albert IV, the Duke of Bavaria, stating that beer must be brewed from only three ingredients: water, malt, and hops.

It marks the 29th year since the Soviets stopped jamming Radio Liberty, which worked to counter communist propaganda directed at intellectuals in Europe, and beyond.

It has been 93 years since the first photo facsimile was transmitted across the Atlantic by radio using a process developed by Winnipeg's own William Stephenson.

It has been 63 years since the first meteorite known to strike a person hit Elizabeth Hodges of Alabama on the hip.

It has been eight years since Canada began its recovery from the depths of the global recession, under the leadership of the previous government.

It has been two years since someone sold 680,000 shares in Morneau Shepell a week before new tax measures were introduced that deflated the stock market. Canadians want to know this. Who was it?

* * *

EID MILAD-UN-NABI

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 1, Muslims across Canada will celebrate Eid Milad-un-Nabi, commemorating the birth, life, and the message of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, by sharing happiness, harmony and love with fellow neighbours.

Statements by Members

The Islamic Association of Western Canada, Jamia Masjid Aulia Allah, Fiji Islamic Centre, Naqshbandi Islamic Centre, and many other local Surrey masjids and organizations will be holding prayers and celebrations.

I am proud to represent one of the most diverse communities in Canada that brings together a mosaic of cultures, religions, and languages.

On behalf of the residents of Surrey-Newton, I would like to extend my best wishes to all those celebrating Eid Milad-un-Nabi.

* * *

● (1415)

NANJING MASSACRE COMMEMORATIVE DAY

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Dec. 13, events will be held in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and B.C. to mark the Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day.

Eighty years ago, Imperial Japanese army forces raped an estimated 20,000 to 80,000 Chinese women and girls, and some 300,000 people were killed. Western eye-witnesses in Nanjing described the atrocities as “hell on earth”.

After the Nanjing massacre, the military sexual slavery system for the Japanese military expanded rapidly. Some 200,000 women from Korea, the Philippines, China, Burma, Indonesia, and other Japanese occupied territories were tricked, kidnapped or coerced into working in brothels to serve as “comfort women” to the Imperial Japanese Army.

Documents of the Nanjing massacre were included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

Thekla Lit, from BC ALPHA, worked with the B.C. NDP government to develop a resource guide, including *The Rape of Nanking*.

I thank Canada ALPHA for its dedication to ensuring that Canadians remember and learn from this history.

* * *

JEWISH REFUGEE DAY

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Jewish Refugee Day, a day that is set aside to commemorate the 850,000 Jews across the Middle East who were displaced from their homes as a result of religious persecution during the 1940s to the 1970s.

This year, B'nai Brith has once again put together a campaign to commemorate these refugees in a bid to promote awareness of this great injustice.

I am proud to share with the House that this year, B'nai Brith Canada has teamed up with Judy Feld Carr, a Canadian activist who single-handedly and secretly helped 3,228 Jewish Syrians leave Syria over a period of 28 years.

B'nai Brith is doing truly outstanding work in honouring and educating people on the horrors that Jewish families and individuals have faced.

Oral Questions

Mindful of the stories and memories of Jewish refugees on this day of commemoration, please allow me to assure the Canadian Jewish community, on behalf of my colleagues, that we will always fight against anti-Semitism and racism in any form and in any place around the world.

* * *

CANADIAN TOURISM AWARDS

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada hosted the Canadian Tourism Awards. Each year, these awards recognize the success, leadership, and innovation happening throughout Canada's tourism industry.

I would like to congratulate all award winners and nominees. They are the people and the businesses that are Canada's welcoming face to the world.

Tourism supports more than 200,000 businesses and 1.8 million jobs from coast to coast to coast, and these amazing people are at the heart of this great industry.

[Translation]

As we gear up for the Canada-China Year of Tourism, I am proud of the investments our government has made to help Canada's tourism industry flourish and create more jobs for the middle class.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on December 7, 2015, the finance minister introduced tax changes on the floor of this House of Commons that led to a drop in the stock market and a 5% reduction in the value of Morneau Shepell shares, but not before someone got out, selling their shares just one week earlier.

Correction, it was not just "someone", there was someone else. Who was it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we saw yesterday, the Conservatives find themselves in a bit of a jam. They are trying to make allegations here in this House, hidden behind parliamentary privilege, that they cannot repeat outside the House. Indeed, when challenged to repeat the allegations they had made on Monday, the Conservative House leader said, "I'm not going to say that. I don't want to get sued."

That is the proof that these are nothing but baseless allegations.

• (1420)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me quote something that is just now being said outside the House of Commons and is on the Global News website:

Global News has analyzed insider trading reports of the company [Morneau Shepell] and discovered that [the finance minister's] father sold a significant number of shares days before his son announced a major tax policy change.

Is that too just a coincidence?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the Conservatives find themselves in a difficult position, because this finance minister has been responsible for extraordinary growth, the best growth in the G7, and has been responsible for lowering taxes for the middle class, raising—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. We are early in question period, and we have already heard a lot from the member for Banff—Airdrie although he has not had the floor, and the member for Edmonton Manning. I would ask them and others to wait until it is their turn to speak, whether it is today or another day.

The hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the finance minister has delivered, time and time again, for Canadians and for Canada.

The members opposite cannot attack on the substance, on the impact, the positive impact of everything that the government and the finance minister have done, and, therefore, they resort not to substance but to slander.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I quote again, David Akin:

In its analysis of trading activity by all Morneau Shepell insiders, Global News has found that Morneau Sr. is the only insider to have significant activity in the days before the finance minister's tax announcement.

It turns out the minister's father sold \$1.5 million worth of shares just four days before the tax announcement that dropped Morneau Shepell share prices. Is that just a coincidence?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, an easy rule of thumb for Canadians watching the goings-on in this House of Commons is to see whether or not the allegations made inside this House are repeated outside this House. As the Conservative House leader herself said last night, they do not want to get sued.

The fact is the member opposite said things on Monday that he is very careful not to repeat outside this House. That is demonstration that this is nothing but a slanderous smear job.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all week, we have been asking the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance a very simple question: who sold the 680,000 Morneau Shepell shares one week before the implementation of tax measures that affected the company? That enabled this person to save thousands of dollars.

Funnily enough, Global News reported today that another individual close to the Minister of Finance apparently sold 200,000 shares. We are talking about the finance minister's father. Either he is very lucky, or very well informed.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to fire his minister—

The Speaker: Order. The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems that once again the Conservatives have gotten themselves into a real pickle. The Conservative members are unable to repeat outside the House what they are saying now and what they said Monday here in this place, because here they are protected by parliamentary privilege.

Canadians can clearly see that the Conservatives are making unfounded personal attacks only because they are unable to criticize our outstanding economic track record and performance.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I challenge the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance to answer the very simple little question they were asked: who sold the shares?

Canadians have the right to an honest, responsible finance minister who takes his responsibilities seriously. Right now, we have a finance minister who is not above suspicion and who is not leading by example.

The countdown has begun. It is not a question of if, but rather when, the Minister of Finance will be replaced. When will the Prime Minister act responsibly and do the right thing, which is to fire the Minister of Finance?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I feel pretty bad for the opposition because we have had the strongest growth rate in the G7 for the past two years and because we are helping middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join it with the Canada child benefit, tax cuts for the middle class, tax hikes for the wealthy, and a small business tax rate that dropped to 9%. The members opposite have nothing they can attack us on, so they choose to make dirty, personal attacks, which are unfounded, since they will not repeat them outside this place.

• (1425)

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel bad for the Prime Minister. We know that the Minister of Finance sold 680,000 Morneau Shepell shares. He told us so. That is not the question we are asking in this House. The question we are asking is this: did he sell them on November 30, 2015, a week before introducing tax measures here in the House? He could deny it. He had several opportunities to deny it, and he did not. If he refuses to set the record straight in the House, why does the Prime Minister not demand he do so right now?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP was the official opposition while the Conservative government had poor economic growth numbers and was not helping Canadians in need. For the past two years now, we have been fulfilling our commitments to Canadians in need, helping the middle class and those working hard to join it, and helping community organizations and small businesses. As a result, all they can do is follow the Conservatives' lead by making unfounded personal attacks.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the lack of respect by the Prime Minister for the House is astounding.

Perception is everything, especially when we are talking about things like conflicts of interest. The fact is that the finance minister refusing to even deny that he sold those shares on that day looks bad.

The fact that he refuses to clarify his father's transactions in the House looks bad. Can the minister or the Prime Minister do the right thing, stop obfuscating, and clear the air in the House?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been answering these questions for a number of weeks, but the fact that we have been responding to this at all is because members opposite find themselves in the difficult situation of not having much else or much of anything to attack us on. This is why they have to invent these unfounded, baseless allegations, that not one of them, from either party, will repeat outside of this House, because to quote the opposition House leader, they do not want to "get sued".

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is only for the Prime Minister that asking questions which he does not answer represents mud-slinging.

First, the finance minister refuses to even acknowledge a conflict of interest when he tabled a bill that would benefit the firm he was working for. Then he consistently refuses to answer the simple question of when he sold those shares in Morneau Shepell. Then he refuses to clear the air about his father's transaction.

I would like to know when he will understand that the only way for him to get out of this mess is to answer and give the truth right now in the House to Canadians.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is we have the strongest economy in the G7 right now with the fastest growth. We have demonstrated that we are helping the middle class with the Canada child benefit and lowering taxes, which is the hard work that the finance minister has been doing.

Members opposite have so little to attack us on substance that they have to switch to slander, which is why they are not saying any of these allegations outside of this House, because they do not want to get sued. I do not blame them. One gets sued when one does not tell the truth.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. All members tell the truth, and I ask members not to suggest otherwise.

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is jumping the shark, and there is jumping the Paul Calandra, and the Prime Minister has done it.

[*Translation*]

The Minister of Finance refuses to face the truth, namely that he is in trouble up to his eyeballs.

Oral Questions

The minister could have avoided this whole mess by putting his assets in a blind trust from the get-go. As he said, he did not. He could have avoided this mess by stating in this House that he was not the one who sold his shares on November 30, 2015, but he did not say so. He could have avoided this mess by explaining to the House the incredible coincidence of the sale of his father's shares in Morneau Shepell, but he did not.

When will the Minister of Finance realize that the only way out of this mess is to tell the truth here and now?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, it is sad to see hon. members of the House making unfounded personal attacks. The members opposite have nothing else to criticize about a finance minister who has not only our trust, but also that of Canadians, because he is delivering on what we promised to the middle class and those working hard to join it. We are creating economic growth that is the envy of the rest of the G7. We are keeping the promises we made to Canadians and will continue to do so.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister and the Prime Minister keep threatening MPs, telling them to go outside. Outside of this House, they have been given every advantage. They have family fortunes. I do not have a family fortune. They have teams of high-priced Bay Street lawyers. I do not have a fancy lawyer, but what I do have is a seat in the House of Commons, and whether they like it or not, in here we are equals, and I have the right to ask them questions, no matter how much more money they have than I do. Why do they not stop threatening members of Parliament and just answer the questions?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I would remind members that each side gets to have its turn, and there are more turns coming ahead. I would ask the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa not to be heckling, particularly when I am trying to ask members not to heckle.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are no secrets here. What has clearly been the case is that I have reported all of my assets. The sale of my shares, which I made when I came into office, has been reported in the newspapers. I presume the members of the opposition can read.

What we are talking about is the fact that I moved forward to sell some shares, and what we did is we then moved forward to make sure that we were following every one of the rules of the Ethics Commissioner. I will continue to work with her. I am disappointed that the House has gotten to this low level of discourse, but I will continue—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister has obviously gone his whole life without having anyone have the audacity to question him. Whenever he has had any problems, his money and his big city lawyers made them go away, and now he is threatening to use his family fortune once again to

threaten members of Parliament who are asking him legitimate questions. If he cannot answer the simple question of when he sold his 680,000 Morneau Shepell shares, why does he not just do the right thing and resign?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely said that I sold some shares. That happened—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I have to ask the member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie and others to settle down. This is a hot topic, I realize, but we have to have each side have its turn, and his side will have a turn again, as he knows. I would ask colleagues to remember that and remember where we are and what we owe Canadians in terms of this place and its image.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite has something he wants to say, if he has an allegation he would like to make, I would ask him to grow some spine, stand up right here in the House, and say it in the House. Say what he means. If he really wants to say something, he should be confident enough to walk outside the House and say it in the foyer. That is the way it works. I would invite them to say whatever it is they want to say.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know all too well of guys like the minister who have a lot of money and use that money to make their problems go away. Right now, he is trying to make his problems go away by threatening members of this House of Commons with his high-priced lawyers. I have asked very clear questions of the minister, and I am going to ask one more.

Is it just a coincidence that both he and his father sold millions of dollars worth of shares a week before he introduced tax increases that helped drop the value of those shares?

• (1435)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I have a level of disgust for what is going on on the other side of the House. I actually did not know that the member for Carleton could sink any lower. I did not know that was possible, but he has actually taken efforts today to move from me to talk about my family.

If he wants to ask me a question, if he wants to insinuate something about me, he should say it here, he should say it now, and he should say what he means, and then he should move it out to the foyer, because truth matters.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the truth matters to the minister, he has an opportunity to tell it. In the 10 days before he introduced tax changes on the floor of this House of Commons that led to the drop of Morneau Shepell shares by roughly 5%, in the ten days prior to introducing those measures, both he and his father sold millions of dollars of shares in Morneau Shepell. Either that was a coincidence, or it was not. Which is it?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will say it again and again. I did give direction to sell shares when I came into office to arrange my affairs. That was something I did.

Oral Questions

What I can say, though, right now, is that I will take absolutely no ethical lesson from someone who actually had a report from the Ethics Commissioner on his desk when he was the minister and did not act on it. I will take no ethical lesson from someone who has been called out by Elections Canada. I will take no ethical lesson from someone who puts his own party out front while he is out using government money. I will take no lessons from him. I will move forward doing the right thing, which I have always done.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the right thing is to actually answer the question. The member is correct that he did reveal that he sold shares. He just did not tell anybody when. I had to dig up the date of the transaction. It turns out that it was November 30, one week before he introduced tax changes on the floor of this House of Commons, which was followed by a drop in the value of his shares. He and his father had sold their shares right before the introduction of those measures.

Again, a simple question. Is that simply a coincidence?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a simple answer, one that perhaps the member from Carleton will not understand. I did give direction to sell my shares, but the insinuation he is making, I believe, is that something that we announced during the trading day somehow moved markets. He might not understand how markets move, but we did—

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the Minister of Finance and other members of the House not to suggest that members in this House are not able to understand things.

I know that there is a lot of heat here.

Order. The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie will come to order, or he can go outside or be helped outside. Which would he prefer?

I ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to remove Mr. Richards.

* * *

NAMING OF MEMBER

The Speaker: Mr. Richards, I must name you for disregarding the authority of the Chair.

Pursuant to the powers vested in me under Standing Order 11, I order you to withdraw from the House for the remainder of today's sitting.

[*And Mr. Richards having withdrawn:*]

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps just a little sense of things that do and do not move markets. When one talks about something for six months, when one announces to 36 million Canadians that one is going to make a change on the top 1%, that would be something we would describe as fully and completely disclosed, much like all of my assets were fully and completely disclosed.

● (1440)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if one read the Liberal platform, one would think that measure was going to come into effect at the beginning of April. In fact, no revenue was

projected in that platform until the beginning of April. Many tax changes do come in in the middle of the calendar year. In fact, the Minister of Finance proposed one last summer that would have come into effect on July 18.

Members of the market did not know exactly the timing of this measure until the minister introduced it on the floor of the House of Commons. Some people apparently did. Who were they?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just a quick review of the facts. I did, as I have said, give an order to sell some of my shares. We did announce to 36 million Canadians that we were planning on raising taxes for the 1%, which, in fact, we did. We know that in fact, over time, the markets have gone up. It is a clear fact and it is a positive ramification of our economic actions.

If there is something the member opposite would actually like to say, something that is worth saying in the House, he should say it. He should say it in the House. He should be willing to say it outside the House. We are looking forward to hearing it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past few days the Minister of Finance has challenged us to ask our questions both inside and outside the House. The question I am going to ask him is one that I just asked in the foyer barely five minutes ago.

We just learned that the Minister of Finance's father sold 100,000 Morneau Shepell shares at \$15.20 on November 23, 2015. A few days later, on December 3, 2015, the Minister of Finance's father sold another 100,000 shares at \$15. Four days later, on December 7, the Minister of Finance made a major announcement that led to a 5% drop in the value of Morneau Shepell shares, which allowed certain people to save tens of thousands of dollars. The question is simple and very clear.

Did anyone know about the minister's announcement before it was made to the public?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is rather sad to hear such a question in the House. They have now decided to talk about our families. If the member has a question for me, let him ask me and I will answer.

What I can say is that I have answered every question in the House. If he has something to say or to allege, he should say what he means here and in the foyer too.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure he is listening, so let us try again. Let me repeat inside the House what I just said outside the House. According to *Global News*, regulatory filings show that William Morneau Sr. sold 200,000 shares in Morneau Shepell before December 3, 2015. Four days later, the finance minister introduced tax changes that dropped the value of Morneau Shepell shares by approximately 5%.

My question for the finance minister is clear and important. Did anyone have knowledge of this tax change and its timing prior to it being made public?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two responses. Number one, we told 36 million Canadians that we were planning on raising taxes. Number two, of course no one outside the closed circle within the Department of Finance and those who needed to know within our government would have known about our actions in advance of that date.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in answer to one of my colleagues, the minister said earlier that the finance minister's fiscal measures affect the stock market, and I believe it. He said the market went up after the budget was tabled.

If the finance minister's fiscal measures have an impact, then he knew, on December 7, 2015, that the announcement of his plans to raise taxes would have fiscal implications.

Did he arrange to sell his Morneau Shepell shares on November 30 in order to circumvent these measures?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. I decided to sell a few shares when I was elected, and then we did exactly what we said we would do, which was to raise taxes on the wealthiest 1%. Those are the two most important things to understand.

What I can say is that, in the end, our measures are great for Canada and for Canadians. We will continue to work for them.

• (1445)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Finance. He has just answered, for the first time in this House, the question that we have been asking him for weeks, namely whether he was the person who sold shares in his family business, Morneau Shepell, on November 30, 2015. He says the answer is no.

Is that not what you said?

The Speaker: I would remind the member that he is to address his comments through the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be absolutely clear. I gave direction to sell shares when I came into office, to arrange my affairs. I do not know on what exact date those shares were sold. It might have been on the day suggested. It might have been on another day. I do not know.

What I can say is, most importantly, we gave advance knowledge to 36 million Canadians about our party platform. We moved forward with that platform, and that platform has led to the kind of economic growth that all of us are pleased to see in our country.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the finance minister's father sold shares at the same time as the minister, but the finance minister continues to avoid every opportunity to tell us when he sold 680,000 shares in Morneau Shepell. Instead, he has given non-answers and is trying to bully us with threats of dispatching his pricey Bay Street lawyers.

If the finance minister will not come clean and answer the simple question if he sold 680,000 shares in Morneau Shepell two years ago on this day, then he needs to resign.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do hope that we will get to some questions that matter to Canadians. I have answered questions about this on numerous occasions.

I can say this. We put forth a very clear platform to Canadians. We said we were going to lower middle-class taxes. We said we were going to raise taxes on the one per cent. Canadians understood that. That is why they elected us, and that is why they did not elect the members opposite.

We have moved forward on that and other parts of our platform, which are leading to much better situations for middle-class Canadians and families across this country. We will continue to work for them.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it now looks as if we know what the dinner conversation in Rosedale was like around two years ago today between the finance minister and his father. Seven days later, the minister would introduce a sudden tax change that would take effect on January 1, 2016, a change moved up from the original start date of April 1, 2016. Who knew that the goalposts were moving? Certainly the minister did, and it would appear that so did his father.

The finance minister has refused to answer simple questions. How can Canadians have any confidence at all in the finance minister?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. There are no secrets here. This has been fully reported.

All I can say is what we did know for sure. We know we told 36 million Canadians we were going to raise taxes on the top one per cent. That is what we know for sure. What we know for sure is that we moved forward on that measure, which is why they were not elected. We know that this action made a huge difference for Canadians.

If the members want to make an accusation, they should make it very clearly. They should say what they mean. They should be willing to go outside in the foyer, as I know they have not done, to say it again right out there.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after much pressure, the Liberals have a new fix to end legislated discrimination against indigenous women, but only after consultations. This is not supported by the women who have been fighting this in court for 40 years. It proves again that the Liberals are breaking their promises on gender equality and respect for indigenous people. Why does a so-called feminist government need to consult on whether indigenous women have human rights? They do.

Will the Prime Minister now remove all sex discrimination from the Indian Act?

Oral Questions

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to working with first nations, parliamentarians, impacted individuals, and experts to ensure that all sex-based discrimination is eliminated from registration under the Indian Act.

Bill S-3, as passed by the House of Commons, remedied all known sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act registration since the modern Indian registry was created. We are now seeking to amend the legislation to also remedy sex-based inequities that existed between 1869 and 1951. With this amendment, Bill S-3 would remove all sex-based inequities from—

• (1450)

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals agreed to the proposed changes to eliminate sex-based discrimination from the Indian Act, but they will do so only after holding consultations. Indigenous women have been clear from day one that sex-based discrimination should have been eliminated long ago.

Although Bill S-3 corrects some parts of the Indian Act as ordered by the court, does the minister acknowledge that the bill fails to eliminate all sex-based inequalities?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to working with parliamentarians, first nations, impacted individuals, and experts to ensure that all sex-based discrimination is eliminated from the Indian Act.

Bill S-3, as passed by the House of Commons, remedied all known sex-based discrimination with respect to registration since the Indian registry was created in 1951. We are now seeking to amend the bill to remedy sex-based inequities—

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to stand with the Prime Minister and all my colleagues here, who stood in solidarity and recognition of the horrible injustices done to the LGBTQ2 community. It was said then though, as I say now, that still more can and must be done.

Can the minister of public safety provide this House, and indeed all Canadians, with what additional steps are being taken?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week I was very proud to introduce Bill C-66, which would allow the expungement of convictions involving consensual sexual activity between same-sex and age-appropriate partners. People will be able to apply for themselves or for a loved one who has passed away. We have committed \$4 million to run the process, which I hope will start very soon.

I encourage all members to help us take this important step toward addressing historical injustices against LGBTQ Canadians, and I would note that with unanimous consent we could move it to committee this afternoon.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day seems to bring the Minister of Finance a new set of problems.

The problem Canadians have is that the very institution of the Minister of Finance is being undermined by his mismanagement. Global News is reporting today that the finance minister's father sold 200,000 shares a few days before the minister's tax policy announcement. Earlier the minister said that he did not know when his shares had been sold.

On behalf of the people of Canada, why is it so hard for the Minister of Finance to come clean with Canadians?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are no secrets here. My decisions have been published in the press. I decided to sell a few shares when I was elected. If my colleague really has a question, if he wants to say something, he should say it clearly here in the House. At the same time, I strongly recommend that he also consider saying it in the foyer, because there is nothing I cannot answer here in the House. I am just as comfortable answering questions in the foyer, too.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take the minister's word for it. What I—actually, it is not so much me as it is Canadians—want to know is whether he is or is not the one who sold the 680,000 shares. I have said that here in the House and I have said it outside the House dozens of times. I am sure that his lawyers are looking into it.

If you want to take me to court, you can do so anytime. That does not scare me, because my job is to ask questions, and I will continue to do just that.

Was it you who sold the 680,000 shares, yes or no?

The Speaker: As I already mentioned to one member today, members need to address their comments to the Chair. When members say “you” here, they are talking to me, and I do not think that the member was talking to me in this case.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, when I was elected, I sold some shares in my former company. It was in the papers.

If there is something the member wants to say, he can say it here. He can say what he wants. If he wants to accuse me of something, then he should go ahead and do it.

Oral Questions

If he has something important to say, then it is important that he say it here. It is also important to say it in the foyer because that way we can understand what he means and see whether he is telling the truth.

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, days before introducing tax rate changes that affected the value of many different stocks, did the finance minister sell 680,000 shares of Morneau Shepell on November 30, 2015?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do hope we will get to some questions that matter to Canadians, about how the economy is doing.

I have repeated on a number of occasions that, yes, I sold some shares when I came into office. What I would like to say is that we then moved forward with our platform. Our platform has made an enormous difference, with the fastest growth among G7 countries, with a huge difference for Canadian families.

The opposition does not want to talk about what is going on with Canadians. What it wants to do is talk about personal issues that have nothing to do with Canadians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I have to ask the member for Brantford—Brant to try not to interrupt when someone else has the floor.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, days before introducing tax rate changes that affected the value of many different stocks, did the finance minister sell 680,000 Morneau Shepell shares on November 30, 2015?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how many times we will have the same question asked. As I said, I gave direction to sell the shares in my company when I was elected.

What that did was allow me to work with the Ethics Commissioner to make sure I was free of conflict. What that did was allow me, like all my colleagues, to work on the work that we promised to do for Canadians. That work is making a really important difference. We are seeing a better situation for Canadian families, 300,000 fewer children who will live in poverty this year, and a housing strategy that will make a huge difference.

This is the sort of work that really matters to Canadians. We do hope we can talk about it in the House.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned the Liberal government appealed to the National Energy Board to fast-track Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline by cutting out the people of Burnaby and British Columbia.

This is unbelievable. This is a very unusual and troubling attack on the City of Burnaby and the Province of British Columbia's

constitutional rights to do their own evaluations and deliver their own permits.

Will the Liberals respect the Constitution, withdraw their letter, and instead support the city's and province's rights to enforce their own regulations?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that, today, the Minister of Natural Resources is in British Columbia, clearly communicating and demonstrating our government's support for the Trans Mountain expansion pipeline.

Earlier this week, the Attorney General of Canada filed a letter to the National Energy Board indicating the government support for establishing a standing panel to determine ongoing compliance by Kinder Morgan for the project conditions of the Trans Mountain expansion pipeline.

The government has taken an important step to ensure that, if a natural resource project is approved, it proceeds in a timely fashion and continues to generate economic—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver East.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 80 years ago, 20,000 to 80,000 Chinese women and girls were raped and approximately 300,000 people were killed. Some 200,000 women, known as comfort women, became sexual slaves to the Imperial Japanese Army forces.

Former MP Olivia Chow moved a motion to recognize this, and it was unanimously supported. Across the country, events will be held to mark December 13 as Nanjing massacre commemorative day.

Will the Prime Minister honour the victims and ensure that Canadians learn from this history by proclaiming December 13 as Nanjing massacre commemorative day?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would be a pleasure for me to have the chance to sit down with my colleague in further discussion regarding this very important issue. Of course, I am always available if she wants to discuss—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period, the finance minister said:

...of course no one outside the closed circle within the Department of Finance, and those who needed to know within our government, would have known about our actions in advance of that date.

The minister has just admitted that there were confidential measures included in the motion that he would table on the floor of the House of Commons. Did he have in his possession a list of those measures on the day that he sold his \$10.2 million worth of shares?

*Oral Questions***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

● (1500)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all keep cabinet confidences here. We, of course, are very careful to ensure that anything we are working on that is government business is kept closely confidential to only those people who need to know and who are sworn into those decisions.

That will be the continuing position of our government, as I am sure it has been for previous governments.

What I can say is that the actions we took on the dates in question were actions that we campaigned on, that we told Canadians for months we would do. We told them we would raise taxes on the top one per cent. Of course, what we saw over time is that the Canadian stock market performed—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister acknowledges that the document he tabled on the floor of the House of Commons was confidential. If it is confidential, that would mean he had access to information that other participants in the marketplace did not. The details, the timing, none of that was certain until he actually introduced it here on the floor, which is something he has just now admitted.

Did he have a draft copy of that motion when he sold his \$10 million worth of shares?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have announced, when I was elected I gave direction to sell some shares. That was something I decided to do to arrange my affairs when I came into this office, as I presume other members did as well. What we then moved forward with was the platform, as we told Canadians we would do. Of course, we keep that careful legislation confidential until it is actually announced, and we did that.

We will continue to work for Canadians, keeping confidences when they are needed, and proclaiming our platform as loudly and proudly as we can so that Canadians can understand what we are going to do in advance.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister told us just moments ago that he still does not know the date on which he sold \$10.2 million worth of shares. That is after three days of questioning on the matter. He has not been able to go back and check his records and figure out when he sold shares of that enormous value.

My question is for the Prime Minister. If the finance minister cannot figure out when he sold \$10 million worth of shares, how can he possibly be trusted with the budget of the Government of Canada?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is something the member for Carleton would like to say, he should specifically say it, and if he is making a particular accusation, he should say it. It would be worth his saying exactly what he would like to say, and if he wants to say that here in this chamber, I will answer that. Then what he should do is take any accusation, anything he wants to say, and say exactly what he means in the foyer.

I believe there is some sort of accusation here. I cannot quite discern what it is, and so I would like him to say it clearly here and outside. That would be appropriate.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is fully implementing Jordan's principle, using the definition and scope suggested by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Earlier this year, the government sought judicial review of two aspects of the ruling relating to the amount of time allowed to process requests and the availability of case conferencing, to ensure full and effective implementation of Jordan's principle.

Can the hon. Minister of Indigenous Services please update the House as to the status of that review to protect the health and safety of indigenous children?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes Jordan's principle, which affirms that all first nation children should get the care and services they need no matter where they live or when they need those services.

I am very pleased to report to the House that we have reached an agreement with the parties on two aspects of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's ruling from May 2017, on which the government was seeking clarity. As a result, Canada will withdraw its application for a judicial review. Our goal is to move beyond legal proceedings and to work together in a collaborative way. There were 24,000 cases approved—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

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ETHICS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister says he gave direction to sell the shares in Morneau Shepell, but he would not have been giving that direction to a trustee of a blind trust, because we now know, contrary to his earlier suggestions, that he had no blind trust. Therefore, to whom did he give those directions, and can he provide us with the precise details of those directions?

● (1505)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for weeks we have been asked a question in this House about whether or not I worked with the Ethics Commissioner. The answer is that I worked with the Ethics Commissioner to show her all of my assets. That is the way we work in this House.

What I can say is that I will continue to work with the commissioner. That is appropriate. That is what allows us to move forward in the work we are going to do.

I decided, though, that because of the perception of a potential for conflict, I would go further than anyone has gone before and sell all the shares in my family company and give a donation to charity of an amount representing any potential gains, which I have done.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

MEDIA INDUSTRY

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in journalism continues, 30 newspapers are shutting down, but the Minister of Canadian Heritage is not worried about it. Some Liberal members are, however, *La Presse* reporting today that it is obvious that not everyone is on board and that some Liberal members are privately voicing their dissatisfaction with the government's inaction. They "have trouble understanding the government's laissez-faire attitude to web giants". The member for Ottawa West—Nepean said that if any solutions exist, we should pursue them. The member for Vancouver Centre said that the minister had said that she would help press journalism but that that is not what people are asking for.

How many lost jobs will it take for the minister to lift a finger? How many members from her own caucus will it take for her to consider this issue?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always been clear on the subject: we value the importance of journalism and every year we help the print media by providing up to \$75 million through the Canada periodical fund. As part of our new vision for a creative Canada, we said that we will continue to support local media and we are also going to help local media that are not yet online, meaning those still available in print form, to transition to the digital world since that is how more and more people are accessing the news. We want to make sure that Canadians have access to journalistic information.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is taking part in the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign, which runs until December 10, because we know that gender-based violence is a major but preventable barrier to equality. In order to achieve gender equality, women and girls, including indigenous women, must be able to fully participate in their communities and in democratic and public life.

[English]

Can the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women inform the House how this government is supporting indigenous women's empowerment and achieving gender equality?

[Translation]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vimy for that question.

[English]

Eliminating gender-based violence is critical to allowing women and girls to reach their full potential, and to achieving gender equality. It is also why we are working to empower women in all aspects of Canadian life. That is why our government is pleased to announce \$5 million for projects to empower indigenous women to be leaders in their communities in order to address issues that affect them or hinder their advancement.

ETHICS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked the finance minister whom he directed to dispose of his shares and the only person he named was the Ethics Commissioner, but to my knowledge, the Ethics Commissioner is not a licensed stock broker and would not be the appropriate person to sell stocks on behalf of any member of cabinet, so I presume that he had his own stock broker. I wonder if he could tell us, did he ever discuss the timing or price of the sale of his \$10.2-million in shares that he sold before introducing his tax measures?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is refusing to explain how \$70,000 ended up in his riding's coffers and is hiding behind his party's half-baked explanation. The party is now saying that that money came from a fundraising event that was held in British Columbia at the end of June.

Since when are fundraising events for Papineau held 5,000 kilometres away from Montreal?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these assertions are entirely false, as confirmed by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. Not only that, but the Liberal Party has moved forward with the strongest standards in federal politics for openness and transparency, including facilitating media coverage, advance postings, posting them in publicly accessible spaces, and the timely reporting of event details and guest lists. Contrast that with the opposition parties that continue to organize their fundraising events in secret, barring journalists, and so much more.

• (1510)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the facts are these. On May 19, 2016, the founder of Wealth One paid \$1,500 for a private dinner with the Prime Minister. On July 7, he got his wish and was told that his bank could open. Then, by sheer coincidence, within 48 hours of the bank getting approved, \$70,000 was deposited into the bank account of the Liberal riding of Papineau by wealthy Chinese individuals from Vancouver.

If that was not a way to return the favour, then what was it?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the Liberal Party has moved forward with the strongest standards in federal politics for openness and transparency, which includes facilitating media coverage, advance postings, posting in publicly accessible spaces, and timely reporting of event details and guest lists.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the deputy House leader of the government what the business is for the rest of the week and for the week when we return.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we will continue the debate on Bill S-3, indigenous registration. Tomorrow, we will take up third reading debate on Bill C-63, the budget legislation.

On Monday, we will have the last opposition day in a supply cycle, meaning that we will also vote on supplementary estimates (B) and the respective appropriation bill at the end of the day.

Tuesday, we hope to complete third reading debate on Bill C-58, concerning access to information reforms.

Wednesday afternoon, we will call C-61, the first nations education legislation.

We will round off the week with Bill C-24, the Salaries Act, at report stage.

I would like to take a moment to sincerely thank all hon. members in this House for coming together on the apology of the LGBTQ2 Canadians this week.

Finally, discussions have taken place between the parties, and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, when the House begins debate on the second reading motion of Bill C-61, An Act to give effect to the Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, a Member of each recognized party, a Member of the Bloc Québécois and the Member for Saanich—Gulf Islands may speak to the said motion for not more than 10 minutes, followed by 5 minutes for questions and comments, after which the Bill shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed.

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)

INDIAN ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act (elimination of sex-based inequities in registration).

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader has 13 minutes remaining.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prior to Standing Order 31 being read, I was well engaged in talking about a very important issue for the Government of Canada as we try to advance Bill S-3 through the House of Commons. We continue to move forward in a very tangible way dealing with a nation-to-nation responsibility, as our Prime Minister has very clearly indicated, dealing with a new, genuine relationship between the national government and first nations, Métis, and Inuit.

In many ways, we are talking about the issue of gender equality and trying to see more of that within the legislation of the Indian Act. We have had many people provide comment on the act. I would be challenged to find members who stand in their place and say that the Indian Act is a good piece of law. The drive to change it, many would say to replace in its entirety or get rid of, is in order.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs clearly indicated, we have to have something in its place. As we work toward that, there are many other things that we can do.

I want to pick up on what the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women said today in question period when he was asked a question in regard to empowering and advancing indigenous women through government programs. He made it very clear that the government is pleased to announce \$5 million that will go toward projects to empower indigenous women to be leaders in their communities in order to address issues that affect them or that hinder their advancement.

I started my speech by saying how important it is to recognize and deal with indigenous issues, this legislation being one of them, but it goes beyond legislation. We need to look at financial ways or alternative ways. That talks about the whole concept of consultations, working with our partners, working at that nation-to-nation level and seeing what else we can come up with. This was a significant commitment.

In Winnipeg North, I have had opportunity to encourage at least one organization to look at this announcement and see if there is room in Winnipeg North and even beyond its borders where we could tap into some of that \$5 million. There are many different impediments that prevent women, in particular indigenous women, from being able to access certain things that we might take for granted.

Government Orders

I am very happy to hear this announcement. It complements what the government is hoping to achieve. I want to highlight some important messaging the government is hoping to communicate to people with respect to the bill. We understand that it is all about ensuring that sex-based discrimination is eliminated from the registration under the Indian Act.

I always find it amazing that here we are in 2017, and with the support and encouragement of our courts, we have legislation recognizing that aspect, but we also have what many people refer to as a strong feminist Prime Minister with a very proactive minister responsible for indigenous affairs and the department that ultimately recognize that this is an issue that does need to be dealt with. I am very glad that within Bill S-3 we will be doing just that.

• (1515)

The bill would also remedy all known sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act. Again, these are things that, given it is 2017, we would not think would still be within the legislation. It needs to be moved forward, at least until we have that more comprehensive, holistic approach with respect to the Indian Act, or at least until we have been able to fill that void that would be created by getting rid of the Indian Act.

It would also seek to amend the legislation to remedy sex-based inequities that existed. It sets it just prior to Confederation, 1869 all the way up to 1951. The amendment, as passed by the Senate, would remove all sex-based inequities from the registration provisions in the act. My colleague from the New Democratic Party spoke at length on that issue. I agree with the member across the way at times, and this is one of those times.

It is hard to imagine how we could justify these inequities. We know we could never justify it in 2017, but there was a time there was gender discrimination to the degree that a male from a reserve could have a child with a non-native woman and there was never any question of the heritage or entitlements of that child. Contrast that with a female, and the heritage of the child would have been questioned if she had chosen to marry someone who was not indigenous. I think most Canadians would recognize just how unfair that is. Even back then, we had very strong feminists who no doubt would have recognized that sense of unjust legislation. I am surprised that it is still in legislation today. That is one of the reasons members should seriously look at the legislation. I understand that we will be voting the legislation through, hopefully before the end of next Monday.

We recognize the government amendment was passed by the Senate as the best way to achieve the stated goal of getting rid of the sex-based inequities. We will be launching consultations early next year that will look at a broader range of the Indian Act registration and membership issues. That is really important. I sat for many years in the opposition benches, and we had legislation that impacted our indigenous communities. I would often talk about the importance of consultations. There is always room for improvement. Even under our administration, we can always strive to be better at working with people to ensure we are consulting in a very thorough fashion.

I have found there is no shortage of ideas related to issues such as we are talking about today. I often have individuals come by my local restaurant, which I go to every Saturday from 10 to 2. I will not

say which restaurant, but I am committed to going so constituents know they can visit me to share their thoughts and ideas.

• (1520)

In the last number of months I have had a half dozen or more individuals talk to me about the United Nations or Bill C-262, proposed by one of our NDP colleagues and has been advanced for debate in the chamber. I have received postcards on it. I have had phone call discussions. Even in group meetings, there is always a great detail of interest in having that dialogue. I can only imagine in the macro picture the degree to which we need to be sensitive to the need for consultations.

On that note, I would like to extend my recognition and congratulations to both the minister of indigenous affairs and the parliamentary secretary to indigenous affairs. They have done an outstanding job in working with indigenous community members and the leadership, ensuring the government is moving on what are some absolutely critical issues going forward.

As a general rule, we will see more legislation and budgetary measures. A good example of that was the recent announcement of the housing strategy. It was a historic announcement in the House by the minister responsible for housing.

It was commented that despite this wonderful plan to provide housing for literally hundreds of Canadians into the future, there was still a very important component that needed to be expanded upon, and that is the indigenous factor. We need to work with indigenous leaders to ensure housing and housing standards are also put on the table.

Today, many would see this as long overdue legislation. In a good part, they are right. It is long overdue, but it will pass through. I do not want people to think, whether it is from the remarks by the Prime Minister or others with respect to this important relationship, that this is all we will do. There is other legislation. There are budgetary measures. There is a very high sense of willingness to co-operate, to continue to develop, and promote that nation-to-nation relationship.

* * *

• (1525)

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that Monday, December 4 shall be an allotted day.

* * *

INDIAN ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act (elimination of sex-based inequities in registration).

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with great interest. He talked about the importance of a nation-to-nation relationship and consultation.

Government Orders

I would like the member to talk about the consultation process with the Premier of the Northwest Territories. He was given a 45-minute warning of an announcement of a moratorium on offshore drilling, where \$3.2 billion of investment flows out of the territories. Could he also talk about what the Liberals did when they announced the ban on tankers, which crippled a number of first nation communities with respect to their opportunity to have economic development and opportunities?

The hon. member spent 20 minutes talking about the importance of consultation and how the Liberals would have a consultation process with Bill S-3. If that process is anything like their consultation process with the moratorium, or with the tanker pipe ban where they have absolutely destroyed first nations' communities and their opportunities, then he needs to justify how the process is anything but a sham.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed with the question. The member was in the House when Stephen Harper was the prime minister. I am very much aware of the lack of consultation with indigenous communities.

It was nice that there was a formal apology, but with that formal apology came a higher expectation with respect to the relationship between the Government of Canada and first nations. Even before our Prime Minister assumed the office, when he was the leader of the Liberal Party, which had third party status, he often referred to the importance of indigenous issues and the nation-to-nation relationship. A big part of nation-to-nation relationship means that the government and first nations need to work together and consult.

The member made reference to a specific issue. I indicated in my speech that there was always room for improvement and we could always do better. We will strive to do just that.

• (1530)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has committed to reconciliation, to a nation-to-nation relationship, to implementing UNDRIP, to implementing all of the truth and reconciliation calls for action, and to work differently. I want to see the government doing that sooner rather than later.

For decades, indigenous people have been asking for new, more honourable legislation. Why did the government not put its time, effort, skills, and expertise toward drafting substantial legislation that would get rid of all discrimination? Why tinker with a flawed bill? If the government is moving into something different, then why not bring forward legislation that will be transformative, that will really give an indication that the things I mentioned earlier are the way the government is going to work now and into the future?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, there are so many things the government could be doing. Once everything is all said and done, I believe we will have it right.

There will be a legislative component and a budgetary component to this as we move forward. Significant consultation has to be done with indigenous people, in particular, the leadership, to ensure we make significant progress over the coming years. We should strive for that.

We need to recognize that it took many decades for today's issues to get there.

I can give the House a specific example of a big issue for me personally, and that is foster care. I am really concerned about the number of children who have been apprehended and are living in foster care.

I suspect many different issues are raised with the ministry. It is very complicated to have to work with a wide variety of stakeholders. We look toward indigenous leaders to enable good, solid government decisions, nation-to-nation building. We cannot say here is the plan and let us implement it today. This will take a number of years to fix and it needs to evolve. It has taken decades to get where we are today. It will take a number of years to get it right. We are moving forward, and we should recognize that. However, we still can strive to do so much more.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to a question that was asked during question period on the consultative process. Could my hon. colleague speak to why these consultations and building a comprehensive plan for this legislation are particularly important, especially when we are looking to build and strengthen a nation-to-nation relationship, moving past a colonial approach to how we work with our indigenous partners?

• (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, working and consulting allow for individuals to build bridges. An example is Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata from Winnipeg, which is an organization that literally helps hundreds of indigenous women. We had the recent \$5 million announcement to assist in helping women to advance themselves, hopefully taking down barriers. Establishing those contacts allows us to hopefully empower, or request or suggest that these available monies are tapped into and are used to the benefit of indigenous people.

When we talk about consultation, yes it is really important. I like to highlight that when we think of consultations, we should think of the building of bridges between nations that takes place and how we can have a positive impact. If we recognize that, we will have more people addressing those very important problems in our communities and ultimately advancing.

I will give a final plug to my example of child care, something I take very personally. I want to see more done on that file.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier in his responses, the member for Winnipeg North talked a bit about nation to nation. I submitted an Order Paper question asking the government what it meant when it said nation to nation. I received a response back, saying that it did not know what it meant. That is what the government sent me back. Therefore, could the member outline what he thinks nation to nation is?

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, when I sat in opposition, I saw the Stephen Harper government. When I think of nation to nation, I think of a great deal more respect, a great deal more co-operation, and two levels of government that can sit at a table and work through problems so all people who call Canada their home can be better off.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill S-3. I will be sharing my time with the member for Peace River—Westlock.

When I was chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we did a number of studies, in particular on gender equality. Gender equality is built on many pillars, but essentially, its aim is to ensure that men and women are treated equally in all aspects.

Correcting an irregularity like the one raised in this bill is a simple and obvious way to move towards real gender equality. I am proud to support Bill S-3 and I appreciate having the opportunity to speak in favour of this legislation here today. An individual's status should not be based on their sex. It is a question of history and culture, and righting this wrong is a logical step.

[*English*]

I am very happy to talk about Bill S-3. For those who are not familiar with this bill, it amends the Indian Act. It seeks to remedy gender inequality for those born after 1951.

The changes to the act, specifically, are to replace the long title; to delete from the bill a clause that has been quite controversial, and there has certainly been some discussion about the “6(1)(a) all the way” clause today; and to add the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the list of documents the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs has to consider during promised forthcoming consultation on those issues. Those are really the changes to the bill.

I am definitely in support of gender equality. I talked about my experience on the status of women committee. I would also mention that I have two non-status Métis daughters. Gender equality, when it comes to status, is very important. I am glad to see that this bill would take steps in that direction.

If we think about the record of the party I represent, we did a lot of things when it came to gender equality for first nations women. You may recall the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act, which was brought forward to address differences in the way women were treated with respect to matrimonial property over men.

It is notable that the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs actually voted against that measure. I see that there is a change of tune now on the other side when it comes to gender equality.

In addition to that, we re-introduced legislation to guarantee people living on reserve the same protection other Canadians enjoy under the Human Rights Act. That was another thing the Conservative Party was proud to bring in. We also addressed, under Bill C-3, the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act, in 2010, the *McIvor v. Canada* case to allow eligible grandchildren of women

who lost their status as a result of marrying a non-Indian man to be entitled to registration.

Members can see that the party has a history of taking steps to try to restore gender equality in our first nations and Inuit societies.

With that, I am certainly glad to see this bill moving along. That said, I would be remiss if I did not talk about how botched this legislation already is. It is bad enough that the Supreme Court had to order the government to do something, but to then have to get two court extensions shows a lack of planning and a lack of an ability to execute.

I noted that there were lots of struggles on the way to getting this bill here. It does not seem that it is just this bill. It seems that the government has great difficulty executing any number of things when it comes to first nations people.

● (1540)

We know that there was a big push to spend \$8.4 billion to eliminate the problem of not having clean water in first nations communities across the country. We see now 120 more boil water advisories than we had at the beginning, and we are two years into it. It really shows a lack of ability to execute.

The other example would be the murdered and missing aboriginal women effort. I have quite a number of things to say about that one. First of all, in almost two years, 20 people have resigned or been fired from that initiative.

The government talks about its nation-to-nation relationship and that it is going to consult broadly and everything else. Here is an example of a consultation where it has talked to very few victims. The Liberals have spent a huge amount of money, and it is two years up the road.

There has been a lot of press on this issue saying that people are dissatisfied: there is no plan, there is no schedule, there are inadequate computers and Internet access, there are limited aftercare plans for the family members who are trying to participate, there was an eight-month delay in opening offices, and there was a four-month delay in hiring staff. There is a whole shopping list of things that are wrong with the murdered and missing aboriginal women inquiry. It does not inspire confidence that the government will be able to execute properly in the go forward.

The Liberals need to not be all talk and no action. They need to learn how to execute and actually say the things they mean and then follow up and do the things they need to do.

If we want to talk about examples of places where the Liberals say they want a nation-to-nation relationship but then do not actually follow through, we can look at a number of examples. We see, for example, that the courts said that indigenous children were being discriminated against with respect to welfare, yet the government was ordered to pay \$150 million and dragged its feet on that. How can they have a nation-to-nation relationship when they will not even do what the courts are ordering them to do to give restitution to children? It is ridiculous.

Government Orders

We can talk about the oral health of indigenous people. We see that the government would rather spend \$110,000 fighting in court than pay \$6,000 for dental work for an indigenous child. That again does not say to indigenous people that the government wants a nation-to-nation relationship. It is pretty much hypocrisy.

I am concerned about Bill S-3. I see that it is well intentioned, but in the execution of it, it could become problematic. There were amendments in the Senate, and I am glad to see that some of them were taken along, because that does not always happen. A lot of times, when the Senate has brought amendments, they are refused here. That is a total waste of the taxpayers' money in terms of the Senate, because if the Senate is doing all this work to bring amendments, and they are rejected here, it seems a little pointless.

The fact that there are so many Senate bills coming forward is also a bit problematic. We have a limited amount of time in the House, and the government is running on promises that it is having trouble keeping, but there are a lot of promises, and it is getting late in the mandate to start delivering on some of those things. Every one of the Senate bills disrupts the agenda of the day.

Although I am in favour of Bill S-3, and certainly of gender equality and the restoration of that to first nations people, I wanted to point out a few of those things I see.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to reiterate my support for this bill. While the Liberal government seems to be incapable of keeping a single election promise, I am pleased that at least it appears to support this effort to achieve gender equality with respect to the transmission of Indian status.

I would again like to thank my colleagues across party lines for their efforts today, as well as the Senate for the hard work it has accomplished since the beginning of the study. The Liberal government has already managed to extend the deadline twice, but the court appears to have no intention of extending it a third time.

It is time to pass this legislation in order to solve a problem that the government seems to be avoiding.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my colleague, and I want to highlight something I thought she talked about quite well. In fact, on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network this morning, we were asked the same thing. It is two years into the mandate of the Liberal government, and we were asked for a letter grade on how the government was doing with respect to its commitments to indigenous people in Canada. I said I would give it an A-plus for talk but a C-minus for action.

Bill S-3 is one example of a piece of legislation that has been botched from the very beginning. We are a year from when it was first introduced in the Senate. The government has had to have the deadlines extended twice by the courts, and of course, we are now up against a timeframe. We found many flaws in this legislation when it first came for pre-study at committee.

I would invite more comment on the current government's execution on the issues that it speaks so well about but really fails to execute on.

• (1550)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, certainly the broken promises that have come out of the Liberal government are unbelievable. I will list a few to remind members. There was going to be a \$10-billion deficit. Now it is \$20 billion. They were going to budget within the mandate. No. There was home mail delivery. No. There was electoral reform and the last election under first past the post. No. It goes on and on.

First, when we look at the promises that were made and the mandate trackers and promise trackers that are on the web, they show that the government really does not do a good job of keeping its promises. Second, even though the murdered and missing aboriginal effort is well intentioned, and I talked about the people who had been fired, we are two years into it and nothing is happening. There have been very few people interviewed, and there are a lot of complaints from the indigenous folks.

It is the same thing with the water initiative. The water initiative is great, and with the \$8.4 billion, we should solve that. As an engineer who was in construction for 32 years, if I had been given that project, in two years we would be making progress, not having 120 more boil water advisories.

Those are typical of the government's great ideals and all the talk that goes on but the poor execution.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is ironic about all of this is that the member opposite said that if we gave the Conservatives those initiatives and that time, they would have all of that fixed, yet they had 10 years and fixed absolutely nothing. If I had the time, I could go on with the litany of things they failed to even attempt to fix.

What we are doing today is remedying sex-based inequities in the Indian Act going back to 1869. The government opposite, over the 10-year period it was here, had four court cases demanding that the Government of Canada take action on fixing these inequities within the Indian Act, and it failed to do so.

I would like to ask the member this question. Why is it that your government failed so terribly in responding to indigenous people in this country and continued to govern under an act that was flawed, racist, and discriminatory against indigenous women in this country and did absolutely zero about it?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members to put their questions through the Speaker and not directly. I am sure the member did not mean my government.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Government Orders

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the party did not have the benefit of having me for the past decade, but I am here now. We cannot change the past. We can only change the future. With that said, I am happy to talk about the record of the Conservative Party with respect to indigenous rights.

Let us not forget that we brought forward the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act, a measure to restore gender equality in the way matrimonial property was treated, which most of the Liberals voted against.

We also gave people living on reserve the same protections other Canadians enjoy as part of the Canadian Human Rights Act. We also brought forward Bill C-3, the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act, allowing eligible grandchildren of women who had lost their status as a result of marrying non-Indian men to be entitled to registration.

I think our record is clear. We were moving in a positive and good direction, and now that I am on board, it is even better.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a great speech by my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton. I know she is always a very passionate speaker and I very much appreciated her speech.

I am proud to stand today to speak about this as well. The title of this bill, the elimination of sex-based inequities in the Indian Act, is a bit of a misnomer. It should probably read say that it is an attempt to get rid of them. That is what we are dealing with today. This particular bill had a very tumultuous passage through the parliamentary system of Canada. It started out in the Senate, came to the House, and went back to the Senate. There have been messages sent back and forth. There have been extensions given by the courts. This bill has been interesting to follow. Even very experienced members are saying it is an interesting way of trying to pass a bill. There is no doubt about that.

One of the roles, and I would say the role, of the Government of Canada is to ensure that there is justice. I am all in favour of limited government, but the role of the government is justice. In this particular case, that is what we are looking at. We need to ensure that justice is done. The government is trying to walk a fine line when it comes to this bill. It is saying it cannot eliminate all of the gender-based discrimination without imposing some sort of band membership on first nations. That continues to be a problem.

Ms. Catherine Twinn, who lives in my riding, is the wife of former senator Walter Twinn, and her step-daughter, Deborah, has neither status nor band membership. This bill would do nothing to rectify Deborah's situation. Deborah Serafinchon is her full name. She has DNA evidence proving that she is the daughter of Walter Twinn, the former chief of the Sawridge First Nation, and she is unable to get status, let alone band membership. When we deal with this particular bill, it would be great to get rid of all of the gender-based inequities. However, when Deborah was at committee, she noted that she was Indian enough to be discriminated against, but not Indian enough to get status. That is how she put it, and it went viral on Facebook. I know that for sure.

In the case of this particular bill, we are dealing with the truth of the situation, and just this situation. What this comes down to is that

the courts dictated to the government that it bring forward this legislation. The one thing it failed to take into consideration is whether individual bands are under the same rules as the Government of Canada. We like to talk about their nation-to-nation relationships, self-determination, and all kinds of things, but the fundamental question is whether bands are under the same requirements as the Government of Canada to comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. At committee, that is what Deborah said, that even if she were to get status, her band may not allow her membership. She said we need to ensure that, on the basis of her DNA evidence, she could get status and band membership. We are looking to the government for some sort of mechanism within Bill S-3, some sort of appeal process or due process, that individual band members can use to ensure that they get their status, if they are entitled to it, as well as band membership, if they are entitled to it.

• (1555)

This is the discussion the current government is not interested in having. The Liberals do not want to talk about it. In fact, the member for Bay of Quinte likes to talk more often about how we must give status to all first nations who are entitled to status. We must be careful that we do not annoy particular bands who want to limit their band lists. This is going to be the cut and thrust of this particular bill.

Deborah has been consistent in saying that Bill S-3 would not solve her problems, because it would not give her status and band membership. Therefore, she is continuing to call on the government to fix Bill S-3 so that she can get her status, and eventually her band membership. To some degree, the truth of the situation is what is most pertinent to this. She has DNA evidence that she is the daughter of Walter Twinn, a renowned chief from the Sawridge band, a former senator in fact. She has proof of that, and yet she is unable, through any system that we currently have, to get status, even though her father has status. She is also unable to get band membership, even though her father was the chief of the band for a very long time.

This is the truth of the situation, and yet we have no system whatsoever, including the changes that would be made by Bill S-3, of an appeals process in order to be able to say to the Government of Canada, "Please help me in my search for justice and help me to stand up to ensure that I get status and band membership without taking my band to court". Deborah is a woman of very limited means. She does not have any high-priced lawyers at her disposal. She has only DNA evidence. She is unable to hire a lawyer to take this to court. She is prepared to take it to court, but she clearly does not have the funds to do that. Why can there not be a system of appeals, a system of due process, something that she can appeal to to ask why she cannot have status and band membership. That is what Deborah is looking for, in particular, when it comes to Bill S-3. That is what she said when she came to the committee, and we are looking for that too.

All of that said, one of the very interesting things about this is that the Liberal government continues to say that it will hold consultations, consultations, consultations. The Liberals say they will implement phase one of Bill S-3 and then consult on how to implement the other phases of the bill.

Government Orders

I just want to talk a bit about consultations. It very much seems that when the current government members want to delay something, when they want to postpone something, and when they want to push something off that they do not want to deal with, they say they are going to consult and get back on it. Someone who should be consulted on this would be Deborah, for example. She is perhaps an anomaly but still someone who would definitely be impacted by Bill S-3. Has she been consulted? No, there has been no contact whatsoever. She had to come to committee on her own accord. She had to reach out to me and ask to get to committee. That has been the only consultation she has had.

We can look to other examples as well. We see the imposition of a drilling moratorium in northern Canada without any consultation. When the government wants to do something, it can do something very quickly and it does not seem to really need to do a consultation about it. When Bill S-3 first came to committee, we had the very people who had taken the government to court to force the bill to come into place, and they said they were not even consulted and that the first time they saw the bill was the time we also first saw it. The first time they were consulted was when we asked them to come to committee to hear them.

I do not have any confidence that the current government knows how to manage anything. I will be supporting this particular bill from this point forward, but there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done, and I look forward to the Liberals doing something, although I am not confident they can manage this whatsoever.

• (1600)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has heard the NDP amendments to the bill. We brought them forward because we believe that the government has been dragging its heels on something that is fundamentally important to eliminating the discrimination that exists right now in the Indian Act, and to eliminating the colonialism that we find in the current government's approach. To improve the situation, we brought forward the amendments, but it is very clear that the government is not willing to make the important move of finalizing the legislation. There are a lot of holes. All that the Liberals have committed to is further consultations.

Does the member believe it is important for the government to act, rather than to repair only some of the issues that are in the act and not address others, and then hold out on a faint promise that some day it will act on the other clauses?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, the member asked if it is imperative that the government act. One of my great critiques of the Liberal government is that it says a lot of nice things. It says the most amazing things, has crafted the words and made it just right. It has the terms just right, including, for example, that we will have a renewed nation-to-nation relationship. However, that is the extent of it. It recites nice words, such as that it is going to put a tanker ban on the west coast. Those are nice words, but the desired result is never achieved by the government.

Another example is the marijuana legislation. The government is saying it will keep marijuana out of the hands of children, but is going to legalize it at the same time. Again, it says really nice things, reciting what it is going to do, but never achieving it. This is because

it is incapable of managing anything. That is what this comes down to.

Canadians have given the Liberals the keys to the car of Canada, who are unable to figure out how to start it. They are unable to put gas in the tank and get it going. That is what this is all about. This particular bill, Bill S-3, comes right back to that. They say they are going to fix gender-based inequities in the Indian Act and come out with this piece of legislation that says really nice things, but it would not give Deborah in my riding any satisfaction whatsoever.

• (1605)

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's questioning the integrity of other members of the House and of whether or not they would deliver on their promises.

In respect of the bill before us, does he intend to support the bill?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, at the very end of my speech, I said I am prepared to support the bill.

The whole point of my speech was that a particular constituent of mine would not be helped whatsoever by this bill, even though her scenario is essentially the same one we are being told this bill would fix. Even though she has DNA evidence proving she is the daughter of a prominent chief from the Sawridge First Nation, she is unable to get status let alone band membership. That is the issue I am raising with this particular bill.

I am happy to support the bill. I believe that if someone is first nation, they should have status. There is no doubt about that. I am fairly frustrated by the fact that we are here in Ottawa discussing this, but I know it is important to many people. My own heritage is something I value, and I know first nations people need status to be considered part of their particular cultural and social groups.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg Centre.

I am pleased to stand today on Bill S-3, and I would like to acknowledge first and foremost that I do so on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

The government has always been clear that it is committed to removing all sex-based discrimination from registration provisions of the Indian Act. With the government amendment, which was passed by the Senate, Bill S-3 would remove all sex-based inequities from the registration provisions of the act.

The government is also committed to doing this in a way that is the right way, and therefore it will be launching broad-based consultations next year on Indian Act registration and membership reform. This will include extensive consultations on identifying any unintended consequences of the 1951 cut-off amendment and working in partnership to develop solutions to eliminate or mitigate any concerns by first nation people.

Government Orders

While the balance of the bill would be brought into force immediately, the proposed clause regarding the 1951 cut-off would be brought into force after those consultations and once a comprehensive plan to address the identified issues is developed in partnership so that it can be implemented simultaneously.

Senator Christmas, a senator of Mi'kmaq heritage from Nova Scotia, summarized the issue during his speech in the other place on November 8. He said:

...throughout the consultation that is to occur, the government will need to be attendant to the voices of these communities. There will be a myriad of factors impacting the communities flowing from the numbers of those who will receive status dealing with issues going beyond the matter of gender.

I recall the last time efforts were made to address gender discrimination of the Indian Act in 1985. I can tell you with absolute certainty that my community experienced confusion, felt concern and had a great deal of questions about the process and its impacts, both short term and long term.

It's a complicated matter for First Nation bands. It will take time, cooperation and assistance in enhancing capacity to make the significant transition both manageable and sustainable. Effective consultation in this regard is critical. The government needs to be certain it's prepared to go before our First Nation band councils to explain this bill's provisions to leadership, to band members and to those who will ultimately receive status as a consequence of the bill's passage.

The government is absolutely committed to dealing with all sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act registration, including circumstances that date before 1951. By convention, a government does not put into any act or law any provision it does not intend in good faith to implement, and so, this amendment is a clear and unequivocal statement of the government's commitment to remove the 1951 cut-off. Consultations will be focused on identifying additional measures or resources required to do this right and working in partnership to develop a comprehensive plan, which can be implemented simultaneously.

Senator Sinclair, chair of the Indian residential school Truth and Reconciliation Commission, noted in his speech in the other place on November 8 that:

I want to point out that this bill attempts to reconcile two different constitutional obligations that the government has: One is, of course, to comply with the Charter when it comes to gender discrimination; the other is to comply with its constitutional obligation to consult with indigenous people.

He went on to say later in his speech:

So while it is with reluctance that I see us delaying the implementation of a Charter right, I can also see the need to do so because of that competing constitutional obligation to consult. And so I am prepared to support this legislation because it enshrines the right.

In a way, it enshrines both rights: the right to be consulted and, of course, their charter rights that one should not be discriminated against on the basis of gender.

Given the government's commitment to co-designing consultations with first nations, it will not accept the addition of a specific coming into force date to the proposed 1951 cut-off clause. It would be counterproductive to the nation-to-nation relationship.

Senator Christmas also said in the Senate on November 8:

For those who might suggest the lack of a firm date for coming-into-force provisions is a weakness or flaw in this undertaking, I would assert otherwise. The reporting-to-Parliament provisions in the bill more than adequately deal with this, in my mind.

I believe it's also essential to recognize that the consultation with First Nation communities that will flow from the bill's requirements on consultation and reporting

back to Parliament reflect the basis of the Principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples announced in July of 2017.

The bill contains numerous clauses holding the government accountable to Parliament regarding the implementation of this legislation.

● (1610)

Bill S-3 requires consultations on implementation of the clause in question, as well as broader Indian Act registration and membership reform, to commence within six months of royal assent. I understand these consultations are expected to commence early in 2018, and the co-design of these consultations with first nations is already under way.

Within five months of royal assent, the government is required to report to Parliament on the design of the consultations and how they are progressing, and provide a further update to Parliament within 12 months of royal assent.

There is also a three-year review clause in the bill. Parliament will have numerous enshrined opportunities to hold the government to account on its progress toward removing the 1951 cut-off.

In terms of how long consultations will take, the government will not prejudice the co-design process but is committed to working with its partners to move forward in an expeditious manner.

If we do not have legislation passed before December 22, which addresses the Descheneaux decision, the sections struck down by the court will be inoperative in Quebec. Based on the most recent extension decision of the Court of Appeal of Quebec, it is unlikely the courts will grant a further extension. The registrar has stated she would not be in a position to register people under provisions found to be non-charter compliant in Quebec, and would also not register individuals under those provisions in the rest of Canada. Ninety percent of status Indians are registered under the provisions struck down by the Descheneaux decision. We must not lose sight of the thousands of individuals who will not be able to register if the court deadline passes and the provisions noted above become inoperable.

I urge members of the House to support Bill S-3. I am glad to hear that members of the opposition are in support of it in the form that was referred to the House by the Senate.

Government Orders

•(1615)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. colleague started off by talking about the consultations that will be taking place for the next phases of this bill. I was wondering about the principle behind these consultations. It seems that, if the government wants to drag its feet on something, if it is trying to delay something or prevent it from happening, it goes into consultations. However, if it is adamant about getting something done, if it wants to make a big, flashy announcement in New York, for example, it has no problem making these announcements with zero consultation. I am referencing in particular the northern drilling ban, for which the premiers of both Nunavut and Northwest Territories were given less than 45 minutes' notice that the announcement was coming down. Then, when the government discovered that, lo and behold, it had forgotten to do the consultation on that announcement, it said that it had made the announcement and would now do the consultations.

Therefore, I am wondering if the member could outline for us the principles behind the government's desire to do consultations, and whether it is just a stalling tactic.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, I hear the member and his concerns regarding that. However, when I look at the legislation and our honest, good-faith efforts to consult with indigenous people to ensure respect not only for their charter rights but also for the manner and process by which their charter rights are invoked and protected, for the manner by which people have been registered into their bands, and for any unintended consequences that may result from those changes in registration, I feel the government is moving in the right direction.

The Senate amendments, which have the support of Senator Sinclair as well as Senator Christmas, give me great comfort that this is going in the right way.

However, I understand that, if there is a delay in the process, it will affect thousands of individuals who have a right to be registered. This is why I am also so pleased to see that there are defined timelines in the legislation for when Parliament is to be told what is happening, and that there will be metrics in place to make sure the bill is reviewed at five months, six months, 12 months, and three years. That gives me great confidence.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague quoted Senator Christmas, who said that the government will need to pay close attention to indigenous communities. I wanted to ask the hon. member about the importance of consulting, how that process needs to be done efficiently and effectively, and how we can make great efforts after the consultations to ensure that we have proper policies put forward.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that the very design of the consultation process needs to be done in connection with indigenous people. That is why the process itself is co-designed. Without this, I think people would rightly feel that the process was being dictated, that people's views were not appropriately being taken into account, and that a true nation-to-nation relationship did not exist. Therefore, the co-design is a very important feature.

What comes into the co-design is not for me to decide. It is something that first nations people and the government will negotiate. I look forward to seeing a robust process that allows voices to be heard, all possible implementation issues and unintended consequences to be vetted, and then a strong process that respects everyone's charter rights to be implemented as soon as possible, so that indigenous people can be registered without sex and gender discrimination.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that the representative of the Liberal government can square his government's commitment to hear all voices with the fact that last week the Liberal majority at the indigenous affairs committee blocked a motion to hear from Privy Council Office witnesses on how they are handling money for the murdered and missing indigenous women's inquiry. Then today, in the status of women committee, we learned that INAC has declined our request to participate in the status of women committee study on indigenous women's experiences in the justice system. Can you please reconcile those hypocrisies?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I remind hon. members to direct their questions through the Speaker and not directly to other members of Parliament.

The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that all committees are masters of their own domain and can determine whether, how, or when they will receive witnesses, but I am confident that the process being proposed under this legislation would allow indigenous communities and the government to work together to co-design a process that would allow people, on whom both groups agree, to take part in the process and to be heard so that good decisions can be made. Obviously, it would not be up to the committee, INAC, or any other. It is going to be something that is decided between first nations and the government.

•(1620)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.):

[Member spoke in Cree as follows:]

Niwakoma cuntik Tansai Nemeaytane Awapantitok.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, how we have progressed over the course of the summer. We have had time to talk and discuss, or, as we used to say or say now, consult. Taking the time to talk and discuss in the summertime is a very traditional indigenous way of doing things. It is great to see that over the course of this summer, the government has had the conversation about the ideals of justice, because justice in this bill is perhaps the most fundamental element to it.

I think about my family story, about who is Indian and who is not Indian under the law. My grandmother met a fine young man named James Ouellette from Battleford. His family had come from Batoche. They fell in love around 1939. On September 3 they had a son named James Ouellette, but then the war started just a week later and my grandfather signed up and was sent to Europe to fight. He went to England and fought his way through the Dutch lands and into Germany.

Government Orders

This is a story of many indigenous men, but it is also a story about an indigenous woman, for James was what they called at that time a “half-breed” or a Métis person. My grandmother, though, was a status Indian who had the full rights, responsibilities, and disadvantages of being a status Indian. However, because she married my grandfather, she lost her status upon her marriage. She did not know that the great course of events in Europe would ensure that her husband did not return for five years, that he would be away and that she would have to raise their son alone.

My father remembers as young boy having to go into the fields of farmers in the Battleford area to dig up potatoes in the dead of night to steal them so he and his mother could eat, because they had no food or money. He remembers doing this even at the age of four. They could not return home to the reserve at Red Pheasant, because they were not allowed to, for she was not a status Indian and he was called a half-breed.

That is the story of thousands and thousands in this country, and this is what this bill is about. It is about the ideal of justice so that this never happens again, so that someone can always go home to their lands, home to their traditional territory, home to their people, home to their family and community, and not be denied their birthright of who they are, who their people are.

The bill, as it was originally presented, only went so far. What this bill seeks to address has happened throughout Canadian history for 150 years, when people have been denied their rights because they married someone out of love. They were denied their identity and who they were. However, there have been people who have been brave enough in the Senate to continue this fight, senators like Lillian Dyck, Marilou McPhedran, Senator Christmas, Senator Sinclair, Senator Watt, Senator Patterson, Senator Joyal, and Senator Sandra Lovelace. These senators have led the fight to ensure that this discrimination would no longer occur. This is a fight not about today, but a fight about tomorrow. It is about who has status today and thus who will determine who has status tomorrow.

When we go forward with the ideals of a nation-to-nation relationship, as we start to take the Indian Act and dismantle it and try to reform these nations of what constitutes indigenous peoples and an indigenous nation, as we try to take and put together what was broken 139 years ago, it is going to take time. As I said, if someone has status today, they will have status or citizenship in these indigenous nations tomorrow, and so it is very important.

• (1625)

There are many even today who would continue to deny people's right to return. No matter what the bill may do, there will be some communities that will say that if one is not part of a community, then that person has no right to be there.

That is not our tradition. In ages past, people could marry on or into a community. They could become part of a community. There were many occasions when people who were not even Cree or Blackfoot or Anishinaabe could change their nations. They could become something different. They could learn a language and be adopted into a new family.

I was just at the reserve in Battleford region where I had an opportunity to meet meeting not only a Mosquito but a Poundmaker.

Poundmaker had been adopted by a Blackfoot chief even though he was Cree, and it was for peaceful purposes. That is a very powerful relationship.

What we did before is not what we do today. Even today, what we do to each other is not always right. We hear stories from near the Montreal territory of people who marry for love and who are not allowed to stay in their community. This was not our way.

In my house I have an adopted daughter. She is not of my blood, but of my heart. She is half first nations from Saskatchewan and half Jamaican. We did not go through the court system to adopt her, but instead used elders, who worked hard to make sure that we did it in a good way, that we did it in a traditional and spiritual way, that it was according to our customs and our customary law. We love her very much. She is not any less of who I am or any less connected to the territory I am from. In fact, I even have a greater responsibility to her.

This is what this legislation is about. This legislation is about the future. It is about how we treat each other as indigenous peoples. I am not sure why it may be decided in this Parliament, which has not always been friendly toward indigenous peoples.

The bill offers us an opportunity to repair the damage of the past, to welcome home those who have been turned away for too long, to welcome home the great returning of people to their traditional territories, to their communities, to their nations, so that we may rebuild the nation that we have, the vision that was laid down before us by leaders like Poundmaker, like Big Bear, like Louis Riel, people who had in their hearts the long-term future of our children.

We are told to think seven generations into the future. Think seven generations from now what the implications will be of what we decide today.

I am very proud of the stance our government is taking. Even though some may say it is not enough, it is certainly a step in the right direction. Maybe it is not just one step; maybe it is a giant leap.

I lay my faith in the hands of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs to accomplish what we have set out to do, to talk during the summer period in the year to come, when indigenous peoples gather across their traditional lands, to do what we call consultation.

I lay my faith in them to make sure that we come up with something that truly represents what seven generations would look back upon and say, “We are proud of the decisions that were made by the parliamentarians of both the Senate and the House of Commons. We are proud of what the government did, of what the opposition did, of what the third opposition did, what all parties did together, that we pushed forward to create a better Canada that was more inclusive but allowed people to reach their full potential.”

Government Orders

[Member spoke in Cree]

[English]

• (1630)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his great speech and would ask him his opinion of the nature of first nations' existence today, in particular, whether it is the nation-to-nation relationship that everyone continues to talk about. Does he think that is beyond Canada, or does he think first nations do exist underneath the Constitution of Canada and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting question and I will try to answer it as truthfully as I possibly can.

Indigenous sovereignty always existed. These nations existed for a very long period of time. In various groupings, they moved around, semi-nomadically in some cases, using a traditional place because it is much easier to know a territory and always stay within that territory to hunt and engage in other activities.

Also one's spirituality is often related to the land, but we also live in the world today, so as we exist in this world under these laws, we have all come to recognize that indigenous peoples benefit much from the Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which are also related to many other international laws like the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, or Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or even the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It is not to say they cannot be complementary to each other. The state has to ensure that it does not get in the way of people, so they can craft a life for themselves. Governments should not be about imposing things on people, but creating a framework so that people can be successful and have good interactions with each other, allowing people, nations, and communities to reach their full potential, because if they cannot reach their full potential, there are costs. There are costs to us not only financially, but also emotionally and spiritually, and for all of our relations, including with the land and for who we are.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying the tremendous passion that the member has for promoting indigenous rights and people in Canada. He certainly comes from a long line of advocates of these principles.

The member knows that together we have all worked hard to do what is right in building on reconciliation with indigenous people in Canada. What are his thoughts on the amendments in Bill S-3, and again, most importantly, what is one of the most important pieces we have to continue to work toward to have full reconciliation with indigenous people?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there are two things that need to occur. As a Canadian society, we are trying to work toward reconciliation, but there are more profound conversations that need to happen among indigenous peoples about what type of nation we would like to have and what it would look like. I do not think we are very advanced in that. We are held up too much in our own

constructs or prisons of mind that have been created for us surrounding the Indian Act.

There are too many first nation peoples in this country, and even Métis people, who only see themselves through the prism of the Indian Act. We need to take the time to adequately ask what should we actually be doing? Where do we wish to go and how are we going to get there? It is wonderful that people have extended that hand of nationhood and said they are willing to be partners with us, but we have to be able to grasp that hand.

At this time, we have not done that necessary work, though I do salute the work of the chiefs, the Assembly of First Nations, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the native women's organizations, NWAC, as well as the Métis National Council, but we are not there yet. There is still work to be done concerning Bill S-3 about what constitutes an indigenous person. As for the Métis, will they now become indigenous under these consultations? These are profound conversations that must be had among first nations and Métis people about what that means. How are they going to work together, because we do not exist in isolation and should not exist opposed to each other?

Tapwe.

[French]

• (1635)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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 Regina—Lewvan, Public Services and Procurement; the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, Taxation; the hon. member for Hochelaga, Indigenous Affairs.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood.

I will attempt to build on some of the comments that my colleague just made in his question and answer period.

I think that anyone in this place would be hard pressed to argue that the Indian Act is anything other than deeply flawed. Passed in 1867, among its many flaws is that it is based upon archaic gender systems. Further, it could be argued that the act was, in its design, never meant to be anything more than a way to entrench paternalism and to assimilate first nations while simultaneously reducing the number of people who could claim status.

The Indian Act paternalistically lumped together a diverse population of people and forbade first nation people and communities from expressing their identities through governance and culture. Subsequent amendments to the act made things worse, not better, for first nations by more deeply entrenching colonial practices into law.

Government Orders

Amendments made in 1884 required first nation children to attend residential schools and made it illegal for first nation people to practise religious ceremonies, such as the potlatch. An amendment in 1914 outlawed dancing off-reserve, and in 1925, dancing was outlawed entirely. Amendments to the Act in 1927 made it illegal for first nations people and communities to hire lawyers or bring about land claims against the government without the government's consent.

Putting it mildly, these issues demonstrate a dark past in terms of the actions of legislators and Canadian officials against first nations people.

The 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples stated that "...Recognition as 'Indian' in Canadian law often had nothing to do with whether a person was actually of Indian ancestry." Instead "status" was used as a tool of assimilation and cultural destruction. For example, a first nation person could lose status if he or she graduated university, became a Christian minister, or achieved professional designation as a doctor or lawyer.

In 1961, the government finally removed section 112, the so-called "compulsory enfranchisement" section, to end this and other assimilatory practices, but the damage had been done. For nearly a century, first nation people were given an impossible choice: try to live traditionally in spite of the outlawing of many cultural and religious practices, or attempt to interact with non-indigenous society and risk losing status. All of this is in addition to the patriarchal system that the Indian Act imposed.

The patriarchal system of the Indian Act is the crux of our debate today.

Bill S-3 was tabled in response to a Superior Court of Quebec decision, *Descheneaux v. Canada* and other clearly identified issues. The court found that several aspects of Indian registration under the Indian Act violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because there were differences between how status was passed down from first nation women compared to first nation men. These provisions were struck down by the courts, and Parliament was given a limited time to pass alternatives. The new deadline to pass legislative changes, after two extensions, is December 22, a date that is quickly approaching.

Aspects of the bill that directly respond to the *Descheneaux* decision should come into effect upon the bill receiving royal assent. Essentially, these amendments seek to remedy gender inequity in the Indian Act for those born after 1951.

The Liberal government added new amendments to Bill S-3 on November 7. Now embedded in the legislation is a consultation period to discern how to best remedy gender inequity for those born between 1869 and 1951. No date has yet been given of when these consultations will begin or when changes will come into force. There have been two court extensions and three different deadlines to get this passed. I note the court has indicated it has no interest in giving the Liberal government another extension. The clock has run out, and it is unfortunate to see that this was not properly planned to encompass consultations ahead of the passing of the legislation.

In a failed attempt to meet the original court-imposed deadline of February 3, the government engaged in very little consultation prior

to tabling. In November 2016, members of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs heard from numerous witnesses that consultation was inadequate, and that indigenous organizations had little time or opportunity to submit their reflections. Additionally, the plaintiffs were not even consulted or contacted in any way by the department or the minister's office. The litigant said that the first time he knew about the bill was when he was called to committee to testify.

Mr. Stéphane Descheneaux said, "we've never been called or asked which way we saw that stuff...I was thinking that they would come to the band and meet us, and say that they're going to go that way, or they're looking to go this way."

● (1640)

Chief Rick O'Bomsawin said:

[They] told us that we were consulted, that they consulted with chiefs last summer. I have not found one chief that they consulted. They've never consulted me, and it was our case. They never even called us.

This is problematic, and while I agree with the spirit of the bill and its attempts to correct its wrongs, Lord knows that across political stripes and different governments we have tried to correct wrongs. It is clear that the Liberal government needs to own up to the fact that its consultations with first nations on this legislation have been poorly planned. Furthermore, the Indigenous Bar Association testified that the bill was riddled with technical flaws and in no way would do what the title suggested to "eliminate all sex-based inequities in registration."

After a great deal of pressure from opposition, senators, and indigenous organizations across the country, including the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, the Liberals withdrew the legislation from consideration by the Senate aboriginal peoples committee, went back to the court to ask for an extension, and returned the bill to the drawing board. The bill we are debating today is the end result of this process. As I have noted with past examples, there is a real human cost to getting this wrong. That said, the legacy of getting this wrong would have future costs as well.

Lalana Paul, a consultant with the Native Council of Prince Edward Island, says that in the Indian Act, "You see so much sexual discrimination, it's appalling that it's still in there."

Lisa Cooper, president and chief of the native Council of Prince Edward Island, said, "I have the right to live a traditional and cultural life that I should be able to pass on to my kids."

Government Orders

Lynn Gehl, a 55-year-old writer whose grandmother belonged to a first nation, fought a 22-year-long legal battle and was finally able to win partial status. However, thanks to the Indian Act, she remained unable to pass her status down to her children. This meant that she was deprived of the chance to vote for her indigenous government and live on land reserves, as well as access to tax breaks and expanded health coverage that she would have otherwise been entitled to receive. She said, “I should be able to pass on my status but I can’t because of gender discrimination.”

Sharon McIvor said that because of the Indian Act, “Aboriginal women and their descendants have been separated from their families and communities, treated as less worthy, less human, less Indian, and not full members of their cultures and communities.”

These stories tell of the deep human impact on first nations of the choices that Canada's legislators make. Given the history of ongoing discrimination, it is imperative that we get this one right.

I know the government has made a commitment to restore relationships with first nations. I could read the list of accomplishments our previous government attempted to do in this regard. However, we need to do better. I have not spoken to this topic very often in the House of Commons, but it is the quiet meetings that I have in my office with chiefs, leaders, and members of first nations communities that really impart to me that all of us in this place need to have a different look at how we approach these relationships. When I look at the process on how the bill has gone back and forth and the consultation process going forward, it is concerning.

Again, I know my colleagues in my party have made it clear that we support the spirit of the bill, and I want to commend the work of my colleague who is the opposition critic in this area. It does build upon previous attempts to clarify and remedy some of the wrongs in this regard. However, I would implore the government members to be clear on what this consultation process means. They need to be transparent with affected members of first nations communities so we can get this relationship thing right.

I want to acknowledge the comments of my colleague from Winnipeg. We are going somewhere. I would like to be going in the right direction. I encourage all members of the House that perhaps we can do a bit better than this.

• (1645)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is fair to say that the member was part of the previous government that continued to govern under this very racist and discriminatory legislation, and chose to ignore it even though three court cases at that time said the government needed to amend the Indian Act.

Today we are making those amendments. We would prefer to be repealing the act, but unfortunately, in good prudent governance, we need to replace that with something else. However, there is no reason for us to delay, as former governments did for the last 150 years, making the right changes, changes that will ensure sex-based inequities are eliminated in the act and women are treated fairly.

The member is concerned that it is not going far enough, fast enough. However, for 10 years your government did nothing. There

was complete inaction. There were no amendments to the act to correct sex-based gender inequities for that full period of time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Once again, I want to remind the hon. members to direct their questions through the Chair and not directly to other members.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that my colleague, whom I have great respect for, rather than listening to my speech, read a bunch of stuff off her talking point paper. She did not listen to the content of my speech and what I tried to say to her. Since the member has taken a partisan attack here, which I was trying not to do in my speech, I will make three points.

First, the member said that we did nothing. That is just wrong. I am looking the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act of 2010, a response to McIvor v. Canada. I was so proud to stand in the House of Commons and support the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act of 2013, which gave long overdue rights to first nations women, 25 years overdue.

This is the problem. We stand in here on these topics, and we make them partisan. Then we go out during campaigns and sell these promises that we never follow through on, instead of talking about how we can get this right. It is just disgusting. It is so difficult to stand and talk on these topics, because we have all gotten it wrong. We have all made attempts. We have all tried to do things right, but we continue to fail.

The government stands and points fingers on stuff like this, rather than asking what the consultation process is going to look like, or how we are going to remedy this. Rather than saying we really have not done a super fantastic job on it, it is the “Hey, Stephen Harper” talking point. That is not creating a new relationship with first nations. We all just have to completely reject that and move forward with a different line of thought.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recognizing that Bill S-3 before us does nothing to remedy gender equality rights for the indigenous women, Sharon McIvor, Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, and Lynn Gehl, collectively, have been fighting this in court for 40 years, as has Chief O'Bomsawin, elected to represent the members of the Descheneaux case. They all oppose this.

Next week Sharon McIvor is going to Washington to address the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and to testify that the time delay in the government's version of Bill S-3, the time delay for the elimination of discrimination against indigenous women, returns us to what we debated on June 21.

This is a flawed bill. I would like to hear my colleague's views on that.

Government Orders

•(1650)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concerns on how we, as Canada, eventually get this right.

In the interim, we are staring down the barrel of a court deadline that is not going away. We have to pass some legislation, and that is why I stood in this place to say that I agreed with the spirit of the legislation, even with it being an interim measure that is going to keep incrementally moving us forward.

I want to commend the women the member mentioned for their advocacy and their fight in this regard. Without those voices, things do not change.

One of the things I wanted to focus on in my speech was the fact that no date was given on the consultation element, which was added on November 7. During debate today, the government could have provided a lot more information on that. Perhaps that would have remedied some of the concerns of my colleague.

This is not perfect. We need to continue to fix it but, in spirit, it is an incremental step that needs to proceed.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here we are again, at the 11th hour, attempting to send Bill S-3 back to the Senate for royal assent prior the December 22, 2017, deadline. I guess we would call this “flying by the seat of our pants” legislation. There is a court-imposed deadline, so the government is going to get it done regardless. We have talked about that in the House most of the day.

Bill S-3 was tabled in response to a Superior Court of Quebec decision, *Descheneaux v. Canada*, in 2015, and other clearly identified issues. The court found that several aspects of Indian registration under the Indian Act violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because there were differences between how status was passed down from first nation women compared to first nation men. These provisions were struck down, and Parliament was given a limited time to pass an alternative. The new deadline to pass legislative changes, after two extensions, is next month, on December 22. The court has indicated that it has no interest at all, which we have talked about, in giving the Liberal government a third extension.

When Bill S-3 was first brought to the Senate about a year ago, in fact exactly a year ago this month, the government sought to remedy the situation by bringing it back to 1951. However, several independent senators proposed adding what is known as the “6(1) (a) all the way” approach. This amendment would have all Indians registered as 6(1)(a), with equal rights and entitlements regardless of matrilineal or patrilineal descendants, back to 1869. The government, though, rejected those proposals.

After rejecting them on June 21 this year, the Liberal government undertook behind-the-scenes consultations with senators over the summer months to seek consensus around an alternate proposal. The resulting proposed changes were tabled in the Senate earlier this month, on November 7, and would come into force in two stages. The first one we have talked about. The aspects of the bill passed by the House of Commons in June would come into effect by the court-imposed deadline of December 22. Second, newly added clauses, which would extend the proposed remedies for sex-based inequities

in the Indian Act back to 1869, would not be enforced until after a consultation process with indigenous peoples on how to proceed. That is the million-dollar question. No date has been given as to when the process would begin or even conclude.

We have talked a lot about this bill, but let us talk about what the previous Conservative government did. It had a long history of supporting gender equity for first nation women. The Conservative government introduced the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act in 2013, which offers a balanced and effective solution to a long-standing injustice and legislative gap that affects people living on reserve, particularly women and children. As a result, many of the legal rights and remedies relating to matrimonial interests in the family home that are available off reserve, in the context of a relationship breakdown, death of a spouse or common-law partner, or family violence, are now available to individuals living on reserve.

The former Conservative government also reintroduced legislation to guarantee to people living on reserve the same protections that other Canadians enjoy under the Canadian Human Rights Act, which came into law on June 18, 2008. It also passed Bill C-3, the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act, in 2010, in response to *McIvor v. Canada* in 2009. Bill C-3 allowed for the eligible grandchildren, or women who lost status as a result of marrying non-Indian men, to be entitled to registration if they or their siblings were born on or after September 4, 1951.

•(1655)

It should be noted that the Liberals, including the current Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, actually voted against the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act from 2013, which was introduced and passed by the former Conservative government. It should also be noted that the legislation that made the Canadian Human Rights Act apply on reserves was tabled by the Conservatives, and then all parties worked together to pass the legislation.

Essentially, prior to Bill C-3, the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act of 2010, and the proposed changes in Bill S-3, Indian status was passed down to the next generation from the father but not through the mother. Therefore, if a first nation male had children with a non-first-nation female, his status would be passed down, but not vice versa. That is what we are talking about here today in the House.

Government Orders

I had a call this week from a friend in Saskatchewan. He is from the Cree first nation. He is unequivocally in favour of Bill S-3. He has a status Indian niece who is married to man from Honduras. Not long ago, they celebrated the birth of their first child. My friend said that he is the cutest little Honduran Indian anyone has ever seen. Perhaps with the passage of Bill S-3, that description should change and he would be the cutest little Indian Honduran anyone has ever seen. Would that not be nice? I think that is what we are headed for after December 22.

My friend also had a very good idea that he passed along to me earlier this week. It is regarding the “6(1)(a) all the way” approach back to 1869. He suggested giving non-status indigenous people up to 10 years to get their genealogy sorted out. That seems like a long time. However, it could be a gradual process. Some people will have their family trees available now, while others will have to dig around and find the right roots and the proof. I think this is a pretty excellent idea he came up with. It would also give the department an opportunity to work through these changes and prepare for the financial implications they would entail.

At this point, it is unknown exactly how many Canadians would become eligible, or would even apply to register, and what the financial implications would be for the Canadian taxpayer. We have no idea whatsoever. It could be 200,000. It could be 400,000. It depends how far back people go in the tree. We need some time to figure this out. I do not know if it would have any implications for roughly one-half of my province's indigenous population.

We, the official opposition, as we have stated all day in the House, support Bill S-3 at second and third readings, because it contains several necessary changes to the Indian Act toward greater gender equality and is the next step beyond the amendments made by the former Conservative government with Bill C-3, back in 2010.

What I do not agree with is this “flying by the seat of their pants” method of legislating by the government. It has had more than enough time to table a good, clean piece of legislation that everyone could get on board with and get passed. Instead, it chose a path it knew would encounter resistance and delays, especially in the Senate.

I do not believe we can please all of the people all of the time, but we as legislators have an obligation to please as many Canadians as possible all of the time. That is our duty, and it really should not be muddled. However, we are going to support Bill S-3. I want to say, on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, they are excited about the bill and are hoping it passes, and then we can move forward as of December 22.

• (1700)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech and for articulating some of the positives, and of course, some of the concerns about this piece of legislation. The positives are that it responds to the court decision as well as to some additional issues that were identified. However, the concern is that it is not perfect yet. I will be the first to acknowledge that.

Given the court deadline and that decisions profoundly impact communities in terms of their membership, it has been a long haul to get here. I would like the member to speak to the implications of the

wait to get it perfect, especially for the people who have been waiting so patiently for so long.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, yes, we have debated this in the House now for a little more than a day. It is good to get this legislation moving. We have talked about it here in the House. We sent it to the Senate. It had to deal with it, and many of the independents did not like the first look at it. Now we are bringing it back here.

We have to move forward. Time is of the essence. We are talking about 1951 onward. Many family trees do not exist before 1951. We know that. There is documentation needed on reserves in the provinces and territories in this country. However, it is a good start that we are moving forward on Bill S-3 now.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that discrimination has existed for a very long time, nearly 150 years under the Indian Act. When I look back and see that these inequities go back to 1869, it is actually shocking. It was nearly 100 years before I was born. Since then, we have not been able to make the corrections that have been needed.

I am very pleased and proud that the government is moving forward at this stage with remedying some of these sex-based inequities. I am happy that the timeframe from 1951 onward will come into effect immediately. I think we all have a responsibility to ensure that those that occurred prior to that period, going back to 1869, are done as soon as possible.

Does the member agree that there needs to be proper and fair consultation with indigenous governments, over as short a period as possible, to get this right and to ensure that all these inequities can be corrected, for the benefit of all indigenous Canadians?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, I think the shorter, the better. We have been dealing with this for a long time.

When I was talking to my friends from Saskatchewan earlier this week, they were talking about needing time to find their family trees. The Internet in northern Saskatchewan, and in fact, in northern Canada, is very poor. A lot of people want to do proper research on their family trees, if we are going to go back to 1869, which is the wish of many of them. I think that is why they wanted a little more of a timeline.

Yes, let us consult right away. Let us get the process moving. This is a good start. We are 85% there. We need to be at 100%, which means shorter consultations. Moving Bill S-3 along would certainly help.

• (1705)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be standing on Algonquin territory.

I will be splitting my time with the member of Parliament for Burnaby South.

Government Orders

After much pressure, Liberals have a new Bill S-3 fix to end legislated discrimination against indigenous women, but only after consultations. This is not supported by the women who have been fighting this inequality in court for 40 years. It shows again that Liberals are not upholding their promise to respect indigenous people and to bring full gender equality.

I do not understand why a government that calls itself a feminist government needs to consult on whether indigenous women should have human rights, because they do. We want the Prime Minister and his government right now to remove all sex discrimination from the Indian Act.

Since its inception, the Indian Act has accorded privilege to male Indians and their descendants and disregarded female Indians as second class. To sum up where we are right now, despite unprecedented government promises of indigenous reconciliation and respect, Liberals are trading off human rights based on budget lines. Indigenous women who have been fighting 40 years in court for gender equality watched in dismay June 21, National Aboriginal Day of all days, as the Liberals gutted reforms that would have made the Indian Act less vile. These were moved by my colleague, the member of Parliament for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and others.

Canada's laws still say that indigenous people with a university degree, military service, or a white husband lose their Indian status. Would one not think that a government that pledged to a nation-to-nation relationship built on respect would want to remove all of those conditions?

“Indigenous women deserve the equality the charter is intended to ensure and protect”, said litigant Lynn Gehl, and they do. There is much support for the government ending all sex discrimination in the Indian Act. Canada has endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which clarifies state obligations on self-determination, including the right to determine membership. UNDRIP already has application in Canadian law.

Also, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women just a year ago called out the current government for the need to act on this file. It said:

...the Committee remains concerned about continued discrimination against indigenous women, in particular regarding the transmission of Indian status, preventing them and their descendants from enjoying all the benefits related to such status...The Committee recommends that the State party remove all remaining discriminatory provisions of the Indian Act that affect indigenous women and their descendants, and ensure that aboriginal women enjoy the same rights as men to transmit status to their children and grandchildren.

It did not set out a very long timeline or an indeterminate timeline. It did not say consult on it. It said that Canada, to uphold its international commitments on human rights, must remove all gender discriminations against indigenous women.

The government has failed, and it has given the House again a flawed bill.

After 40 years of litigation by indigenous women, many of whom are still alive, and indigenous lawyers who have been fighting alongside them, the government failed to ask them what they thought or have them inform the proposed legislation now before the House.

Here are two indigenous women lawyers, and I am paying attention to their words.

Pam Palmater, chair of Ryerson University's centre for the study of indigenous governance, said:

...this bill does not remedy gender discrimination. ...according to the numbers, it actually will only remedy about 10 percent of the known gender discrimination under the Indian Act, and that, by far, is not a bill that's acceptable.

Another indigenous lawyer, now the Liberal justice minister, was the B.C. regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations. This is what she told the House standing committee in 2010 on Harper's version of Bill S-3:

What this bill does not do is address the other Indian Act gender inequities that go beyond the specific circumstances of Sharon McIvor and Sharon McIvor's grandchildren.

This year, the Ontario Native Women's Association said:

By rejecting the “6(1)(a) All The Way” amendment to Bill S3 the federal government has betrayed its promise to Indigenous women. The amendment would have reinstated our sisters and removed all sex based discrimination from the Indian act.

● (1710)

Three warriors whom we are still informed by, these powerful indigenous women, litigated starting 40 years ago against both Conservative and Liberal governments repeatedly. Jeannette Corbiere Lavell litigated for 40 years and is not helped by Bill S-3. Sharon McIvor, litigant and now defence lawyer, asked why they would consult on whether they can continue to be discriminated against. Lynn Gehl, also a longtime challenger of this discrimination in courts, said that the minister of Indian and Northern Affairs is using consultation as a weapon. That is no way to move forward.

Many indigenous women's groups have called attention to the provisions of clause 10, another flaw identified in Bill S-3. With this clause, the government is justifying past discrimination and past violations of human rights. It acts as an incentive to allow the government to continue to discriminate with impunity until it chooses to address it or is forced to address it. It underscores the sense of colonial entitlement. It undermines the rule of law. The government cannot be given immunity for its conduct.

My colleague the member of Parliament for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou moved two times, at committee and in the House, for the government to remove clause 10 on that basis and the government twice has voted it down.

Government Orders

Some of the up and coming women leaders are Shania Pruden, of Pinaymootang First Nation in Manitoba, and Teanna Ducharme, also known as Ayagadim Majagalee, a Nisga'a woman. They both were part of the daughters of the vote taking their seats in the House just six months ago and they both testified at the status of women committee, strong, powerful, young indigenous women speakers. The late Shannen Koostachin informs the work of the House so often. Helen Knott is a Treaty 8 activist on ending violence against women associated with mega projects such as the Site C dam, which again the government is letting indigenous women down on.

In their names our responsibility as parliamentarians is to say again we cannot afford half measures in this country anymore. Gender equality and first nations respect is the solemn promise of the government and of me and my New Democrat colleagues. We are going to keep working hard to keep those promises.

I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint Their Honours that, in relation to Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act (elimination of sex-based inequities in registration), the House:

1. agrees with amendments 1 to 8 and 9(a) made by the Senate;

2. proposes that amendment 9(b) be amended by replacing the words "on a day to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council, but that day must be after the day fixed under subsection (1)." with the words "18 months after the day on which the order referred to in subsection (1) is made."

• (1715)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The amendment seems to be in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her invested interest in what is happening with this bill and, certainly more important, what is happening with sex-based inequities that exist within the Indian Act right now.

I have said before and I will say again in this House that if it were the preference of all of us we would be repealing the act and replacing it with something else. Unfortunately, government has a responsibility to ensure that we are doing proper duty in terms of having a legislative framework and, until we can bring that forward, we are in a situation where we have to make appropriate amendments in as quick and accurate a way as possible to try to rid the act of some of the terrible racial and discriminatory clauses that are enacted upon people. That is basically where we are today in this debate.

In this bill, government would remedy all sex-based inequities that exist in this act going back to 1869. Where the clause would become effective is that from 1951 onward it would be enacted immediately. What the Government of Canada is saying is that it is our full intent and our full commitment to ensure that there is also correction back to 1869, but there is a process that we must engage with first nations governments and with chiefs to ensure that this is done appropriately. The government has also outlined in this bill that it would provide time frames and full and open reports to Parliament.

In the 150 years it has taken us to get to where we are today, surely the member opposite can support the spirit and the intent of what the bill would do to help so many indigenous women in Canada, and be a champion to ensure that this work gets implemented sooner rather than later, so that all of these people who should be captured under the act would be captured in as short a time as possible.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, with respect to my colleague, whom I enjoy and appreciate very much, I will say in the strongest way I can that I will not be a champion for incremental equality. That is not the work of parliamentarians.

One hundred and fifty years is absolutely too long.

The member opposite sets up a bit of a red herring. We are not here today talking about repealing the Indian Act. That will be a good day when that is what we are debating. What we are debating is the implementation of repeated court rulings that both the Liberal and Conservative governments have received to remove gender discrimination. The bill we had before us in this House that the current government introduced, that we debated and voted on, on June 21, was a very short stage, just the 1951 cut-off. It did not have the commitment to go backward, and that is what we are pushing for, complete gender equality. It is not something that needs to be consulted on.

The government, having received push-back from the Senate and having had its bill refused, now is back with another half measure. However, it still is not supported by the indigenous women affected, it is not supported by the indigenous women lawyers who have been fighting this all these decades, and neither should we as parliamentarians accept a bill that is a half-hearted measure and incremental equality. We have waited too long for indigenous women to have fairness in our country.

• (1720)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to stand in this place and speak to such an important issue. I do have to recognize the incredible work my colleagues have done on this, and will continue to do until we repeal the Indian Act and we have full justice and equality in our country, which is sadly lacking.

I would like to explain how I have come to understand the issue we are debating today. I grew up in rural Nova Scotia, in the Annapolis Valley. Through my entire early childhood years, I can never remember much discussion of my indigenous neighbours except to hear about Glooscap's legend and a few other quaint stories, important to local people at times. I really had no context, because in Nova Scotia, like all across our country, there had been great discrimination against first nations Mi'kmaq people from that area.

I remember when I was a kid, I went to a drive-in movie. The sun was just setting, and I was sitting there in the car. I remember looking over and there were kids looking across the drive-in movie fence. I asked my mom who those folks were. She said they lived on the local reserve. Until that time, I had never really realized there were indigenous people living in my community.

Government Orders

We had always had debates about the Acadians, whom the British had pushed off the land. In fact, the land on which my parents' house stood was on Acadian land. We could still see some of the old structure. However, we never had a conversation about the Mi'kmaq. It never really came into the conversations in our household or in our school. It was never taught, except for a few local legends, which were always capitalized on by the colonizers.

It starts to eat away at someone. As a young person, I was not quite sure how to deal with this stuff. However, it was present. I am happy to say that when I was driving along a Nova Scotia highway about six months ago, I started to notice they are naming the reserves on the highway signs. One can actually know, going down the highway, that there is a community there that was never named in the past. That is a very small step toward reconciliation and bringing equality. I am 50 years old. It has taken decades and decades for just that small thing to get done.

I remember the first time I ever said the word “genocide” about indigenous people in Canada. I was a young lecturer at Simon Fraser University, and I was teaching the administration of justice. With my colleague, Paddy Smith, a great mentor of mine, we decided the course had never had a full lecture about aboriginal rights in Canada, so we decided this would be a good time to start.

When one actually starts to research the history of the administration of justice in Canada, one realizes just one lecture, one course, or one degree is not enough, that there need to be entire institutions that look at this sad history.

I remember standing in front of a class of 200 people for the first time saying that Canadians had committed genocide. When I talked about how the Beothuk people were wiped off the face of the earth by our ancestors, it made me realize, with shame, how this whole history had been hidden. At least I can say those first-year students had some sense, somewhere to start, to ask how do we get to reconciliation.

That was probably 15 years ago. I worked on a program and did some research for the Department of Justice looking at on-reserve voting during that period as well.

The amount of damage starts to get overwhelming. Coming from Nova Scotia, where we had the original Europeans coming over, it is reported historically that there was some co-operation there. We went from this co-operation to oppression, to cultural genocide when we think about the residential schools right across the country.

My colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, earlier today was talking about South Africa coming to look at our reserve systems and saying, “This is how you do it. Let's do it back home.”

● (1725)

Then I come to the House of Commons where all of these decisions were made. People just like us here in the House today put act after act forward, which then went to the Senate. Perhaps it was before Canada had a legislature as well. The British are definitely to blame for this. In the House of Commons, act after act after act reinforced and made worse the terrible treatment of people who I did not even know were my neighbours when I was growing up.

We owe it to our future generations and past generations of those who suffered to do the right thing, and I do not think we are doing the right thing. What I am hearing in this debate is that some administrative inconveniences are stopping us from doing the just thing. That does not seem to balance out, especially after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, especially after we looked at all the damage that was done to our neighbours, to the people we should love as much as we love ourselves. Then we get into a debate like this with a bill that goes back and forth between the other place and here. It sounds like people are saying that the bill is an administrative inconvenience, and that seems to be holding up justice, which does not make any sense to me.

I have a constituent in my riding who is in her seventies. She has been trying for 20 years to get her status. She has hired her own lawyers and has been helped by MPs in Burnaby and elsewhere. She came to my office and said she had tried over and over again to get her status but wants to try once more. We are trying to help her get her status, not for herself but for her future generations. Her husband recently passed away. She is indigenous; he was not. She has had to hide from her culture for so long and really wants to be proud of it, and this seems to be the time to do it. Look at what she has to go through. She has to hire her own lawyers and to go to members of Parliament for help. She has to revisit what her family members went through in the past. This seems totally unnecessary, especially when her male family members do not have to do the same thing.

We can talk about dotting the *i*'s and crossing the *t*'s and all of that kind of stuff, but really, when we get down to people, it does not matter. This should be done right away. It seems to me that this could be done very simply despite all of the administrative inconvenience. All we are doing is amending an act that should have been repealed in the first place.

If one is looking at this from the perspective of someone who has suffered, it must be inconceivable that we are doing this. I am deeply ashamed. We can do much better. It does not make any sense to me that one day we are talking about genocide and the next day we are questioning where a clause must go.

I really hope that after we get through this debate, we can get on with the real work.

● (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions on the motion are deemed to have been put and the recorded division is deemed to have been requested and deferred until Monday, December 4, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

[*Translation*]

It being 5:30 p.m., 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 DISTRACTED DRIVING ACT

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.) moved that Bill C-373, An Act respecting a federal framework on distracted driving, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand before my colleagues to debate my Bill C-373, an act respecting a federal framework on distracted driving.

Before I go into the detail about my bill, I want to take a moment to share a personal story. Amutha was the 17-year-old sister of a friend. In 2010, Amutha went to a Halloween party. That night, after the festivities wound down, she got into a Pontiac Sunfire with four other friends to go home. They were all responsible that night. They did not drink, and they made sure they had a designated driver to take them home safely.

Across the city, a young woman got behind the wheel of a Chevy Cavalier. At 2:55 in the morning, the driver of that Cavalier drove through a red light at the intersection of St. Mary's Road and Bishop Grandin Boulevard, and collided with the Pontiac Sunfire that Amutha and her friends were travelling in.

The driver of the Cavalier was speeding, had been drinking, and at the moment of impact was texting. Amutha, and Senhit, a friend of hers, died almost immediately, and two other passengers sustained life-altering injuries.

This event forever changed the lives of the families and friends of those five people who were in that car on that fateful night. I share this story because today we are going to be debating and discussing ideas, concepts, and statistics. I do not want Amutha, Senhit and their friends to be just more statistics. They had hopes and dreams. They had aspirations about what they could do in their lives, and their presence brought joy to their families and friends.

It would be a disservice to them and to their families if we lost sight of that.

Sadly, this story is not unique. It is an experience that many families share. During my time in the emergency room, I provided care to patients who, through no fault of their own, were victims of distracted driving. Tragically, some of these patients died as a result of their injuries. When I tell the House that last year 29 people died as a result of distracted driving in my home province of Manitoba, I want members to remember that the number 29 is not just a statistic and not just a number, it represents the families who will never see their loved ones again, the lives who suddenly stopped aspiring to help make our communities a better place, and the sons and daughters who will not have a parental figure to guide them through life.

While we have made great strides in changing dangerous behaviours like impaired driving and speeding, work still needs to be done on distracted driving. This is why I introduced this bill, and this is why I stand here before the House today.

Private Members' Business

Today we have the opportunity for the federal government to take a lead and address this issue. This bill calls upon the Minister of Justice, in collaboration with the Minister of Transport to work with the provincial and territorial governments to develop a federal framework to coordinate and promote efforts to deter and prevent distracted driving involving the use of hand-held electronic devices.

The framework would include six provisions on the following: the collection of information relating to incidents involving the use of hand-held electronic devices; the administration and enforcement of laws respecting distracted driving; the creation and implementation of public education programs; the role of driver-assistance technology in reducing the number collisions and fatalities; the sharing of best practices among jurisdictions; and, recommendations regarding possible amendments to federal laws, policies, and programs.

In order to fully understand and properly address this issue, we need to have the correct information to properly measure the effectiveness of any measures that are introduced. At the moment, we do not have that.

A report prepared on request by the Library of Parliament states:

There are several data limitations related to the compilation of statistics on the number of collisions and fatalities associated with distracted driving in Canada. In particular, there is neither a uniform definition of distracted driving nor a uniform data collection survey that is used across jurisdictions that would provide comparable cross-jurisdictional data.

Additionally, the Traffic Injury Research Foundation of Canada states:

While many jurisdictions have sought to improve data that are collected in relation to this important issue in recent years, at present it is limited for a variety of reasons.

- (1735)

First, the role of distraction in crashes is difficult to determine at roadside since drivers are unlikely to admit to engaging in distracted behaviours behind the wheel, particularly in the event of a crash. Without direct observation by police or reports from witnesses, or rare conditions being present, such as a phone in hand, distraction may not be recorded as a factor.

Second, while some distraction data are collected, it is often not possible to analyze these data in terms of individual or specific distraction-related factors simply because of the breadth of factors that may play a role.

Finally, data comparisons across jurisdictions is also difficult as each may utilize a slightly different definition of distraction (perhaps in accordance with legislation), collect different levels of detail, categorize distractions using different groupings, or have different types of charges that police may apply based on the Highway Traffic Act.

The report concludes:

To date, measures of distraction or effectiveness of strategies are fairly limited and not comparable across jurisdictions. Often measures are process-oriented, and outcome measures such as crashes cannot be directly linked to results of specific initiatives in order to gauge effectiveness.

A federal framework can help create a means for cross-jurisdictional data collection with uniform definitions on distracted driving and can be an important tool in measuring the effectiveness of current provincial and territorial legislation and programs.

Private Members' Business

One of the criticisms I have heard regarding this legislation is that using a hand-held communication or electronic device while driving is already illegal. This statement is true, in most of Canada. In Nunavut, there is no law prohibiting the use of a hand-held electronic device while driving. There is legislation prohibiting careless driving, but none specifically addressing this issue.

Additionally, there is a range of penalties across Canada with varying degrees of severity between jurisdictions. A federal framework can help jurisdictions create a degree of consistency, but most important, a federal framework can determine the effectiveness of the administration and enforcement of these laws. The World Health Organization, in its 2015 Global Status Report on Road Safety, stated:

To date, there is little information on the effectiveness of interventions to reduce mobile phone use while driving. As a result, a number of countries are following an approach that has been known to be successful in addressing other key risk factors for road traffic injuries. Legislation prohibiting the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving exists in 138 countries, and a further 31 countries prohibit both hand-held and hands-free phones. However, due perhaps to difficulties enforcing this legislation, there remains little evidence of the effectiveness of such measures: in the Netherlands, mobile phone use has been banned since 2002 but there is mixed evidence about the impact of this measure.

The health and safety of Canadians is of the utmost importance to all levels of government in Canada and if the laws that are in place are not properly protecting Canadians, then we need leadership at the federal level to address this issue. I would like to reinforce that the bill does not make any activity illegal. It asks the federal government to take a leadership role in ensuring the efficacy of our country's laws.

Informing the public of the dangers associated with distracted driving is paramount to reducing incidents of collisions and fatalities. Just like with impaired driving, people need to be informed of the serious consequences of their actions if they take their eyes off the road to check a message or send a text.

I bring up impaired driving because this is a similar behaviour that we have been able to change because of education and awareness campaigns. It was not too long ago that the words, "one more for the road", could be heard at a party or a bar before someone left for the night. Right now, it is socially unacceptable for someone to encourage another person to have another drink before they get into a car, and I am certain that there are members here today who have stopped someone from getting behind the wheel if the person has had too much to drink.

We need to treat distracted driving as though it were the new drunk driving. We can do that by changing behaviours and educating Canadians.

According to the Traffic Injury Research Foundation's report on distracted driving in Canada, there have been examples of successful campaigns involving multiple levels of governments with law enforcement and stakeholder participation that have been able to reach a wide audience. However, there were limitations. The report states, "it was also recognized that more active methods of engagement in terms of emotional appeals, social norming, and tailored messages to specific audiences were needed."

● (1740)

Additionally, there are still troubling behaviours in drivers. For example, according to the Canadian Automobile Association, 69% of Canadians think it is unacceptable to text at a red light, but 33% still admit to doing it.

A federal framework can help establish parameters for what is needed to implement a successful awareness and education campaign from coast to coast to coast.

The issue of distracted driving involving the use of hand-held communication devices is a result of new technologies. There will always be new advances, but now comes the opportunity to determine if these new technologies can be adapted to reduce the number of collisions and fatalities.

Transport Canada's report, "Transportation in Canada 2011, Comprehensive Review", states:

Transport Canada has an ongoing driver distraction research program to better understand the safety implications of new technologies and to identify distraction countermeasures.

I am glad this ministry is treating this seriously. Measures are being considered for special features; for example, a phone app that would divert calls to an inbox while driving above 10 kilometres an hour. However, it would be important to determine what recommendations can be gathered from stakeholders and the provinces for a federal framework.

Additionally, the Manitoba provincial road safety committee announced a road safety plan, with strategic recommendations that included considering the need for a coordinated approach and legislative amendments to guide the use of autonomous vehicle technologies as a measure to reduce traffic collisions as a result of distracted driving.

The same report also recommended collaborating with other provincial, municipal, and territorial partners on road safety research initiatives, including comprehensive data collection and consistency. This recommendation aims to strengthen consistency and consensus for data collection, address potential data gaps, and enable better interjurisdictional data comparison and evaluation. This is why I have also included in my bill a provision for a federal framework to include the sharing of best practices among jurisdictions.

Addressing distracted driving is not a partisan issue, it is a Canadian issue, and one that has undoubtedly impacted all of us here in this House in one way or another. As a runner and motorcyclist, I have lost count of the close calls I myself have had with distracted drivers. In fact, only one week ago, within an hour of discussing this bill with my colleagues, I was about to cross the street in front of Parliament when a white SUV ran a red light, nearly hitting me. The driver was oblivious that he ran a red light because he was deep in conversation with someone on his mobile phone.

There is a pressing need for a response and a leadership role to be taken by the federal government. This is why I am asking for support on all sides. If a framework to prevent distracted driving can save one life, then we would have done our duty for Canadians.

I look forward to the questions from my colleagues and for a fruitful and thoughtful debate on this issue.

Private Members' Business

• (1745)

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments. I have had the pleasure of working with him on the veterans affairs committee for the last two years. He and I have had many conversations about his role as an emergency doctor. He has been on the front lines and has seen some of the devastating effects that happen, so I truly appreciate his honourable intention here.

As he is aware, I was a victim of a hit and run. The reality is that the person was distracted because he was drugged and impaired, as well as other things. We see that there are many ways people can be impaired as they drive their vehicles. I am wondering if the hon. member could comment a bit more on not only people driving while on their cellphones but also other issues that may be important that people need to be aware of, as well as the need to educate Canadians about the issues of distracted driving.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his kind words and his excellent question. I would agree there are many forms of distracted driving. This is merely one of them. It would take too long to enumerate all the different forms. There are people who are looking at their instrument consoles and changing radio stations. We have all probably seen people putting on makeup or combing their hair, or in one case, I saw someone shaving behind the wheel.

The member is right that we need to educate the public on all sorts of distracted driving. However, the bill is needed because new technology has taken off very quickly over the last few years. We have reached a point globally where more people have mobile phones on earth than do not. That factor has led to a sharp increase in the amount of distracted driving. I have identified this as a factor that we could perhaps intervene in to prevent further injuries and fatalities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that unlike my colleague, I will still be sporting a beard tomorrow. You will be able to recognize me quite easily.

All levity aside, if there is one thing I agree with respect to the introduction of my colleague's bill is that there is no room for partisanship when it comes to a topic as important as this. I think that the discussions that we will have in the House on how to proceed with this bill will be very enlightening. I will have the pleasure of speaking to this bill in a few minutes.

Motor vehicle safety is an area of shared jurisdiction. Everything having to do with regulations falls to the provinces. I am not saying that collaboration is impossible, far from it, but the only things the federal government has control over are those aspects of motor vehicle safety under Transport Canada's responsibility, and the Criminal Code, which could be reviewed by the House.

I would like someone to briefly show me the differences between this bill and its objectives and the work currently being done by the CCMTA, which in 2016, if memory serves me correctly, created the road safety strategy 2025, a strategy that has exactly the same approach to distracted driving, if I am not mistaken.

[*English*]

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, this would complement that work. One of the things we have noticed is that there is very little data collection. That is one of the key parts of this bill. Right now, the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario are the only provinces collecting detailed data on this issue. This would help to complement the measure the hon. member is speaking of to further address this problem and increase road safety.

• (1750)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill C-373, introduced by the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley. It that aims to deal with the important national issue of distracted driving. It proposes to deal with that issue by requiring the Minister of Justice, in collaboration with the Minister of Transport, to establish a framework around distracted driving in conjunction with the provinces, territories, law enforcement, and other stakeholders.

There is no question that distracted driving is a serious issue and extremely dangerous. Indeed, a study from Virginia Tech's Transportation Institute cited by the Canadian Automobile Association reports that a motorist who is on their cellphone is four times more likely to be involved in a collision. Even more alarming, a motorist who is texting is 23 times more likely to be involved in a collision. The same study from Virginia Tech reports that a distracted driver, on average, will be unable to observe 50% of the information in their driving environment.

It is no wonder that each day in Canada there are dozens and dozens of collisions as a result of distracted driving. I saw recent statistics from ICBC showing that 27% of collisions in the province of British Columbia are attributable to distracted driving. Ontario police statistics show that there are more collisions arising from distracted than speeding and impaired driving combined. Many of those collisions are fatal. Just this year, in the province of Ontario, more than 50 people have lost their lives as a result of distracted driving.

Despite the collisions, the injuries, and the deaths on our roads, the fact is that far too many Canadians choose every day to get behind the wheel and engage in an activity that impairs their ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. Distracted driving is a commonplace everyday occurrence on our roads. That fact is borne out by the statistics.

I was looking at some of the statistics in my province of Alberta, I believe from 2014 or 2015, that somewhere in the neighbourhood of 30,000 motorists were convicted of distracted driving offences in one year. In the province of Quebec, I read that in 2012 somewhere in the neighbourhood of 60,000 or 65,000 motorists who were convicted of distracted driving offences.

If we look at the statistics, there seems to be an increase in the number of convictions across the board in various provinces. I guess one could say that is a good thing, to the degree that it is a result of new laws that have been passed at the provincial level, and of increased enforcement efforts.

Private Members' Business

•(1755)

Nonetheless, I point to 30,000 and 60,000 to say that if that is the number of people who are being convicted of distracted driving offences, I would suggest that those numbers barely scratch the surface of the number of people who, each and every day, are getting behind the wheel and engaging in an activity that distracts from their ability to safely operate a motor vehicle.

What we have is truly a national issue and a national problem. It is a problem that exists in each and every province and territory, yet today what we have is a patchwork from province to province and territory to territory, a patchwork in terms of laws, penalties, enforcement, public awareness efforts, and data collection and statistics. What is lacking is a truly national, coordinated approach to tackling this very serious issue of distracted driving.

With regard to the serious issue of distracted driving and the very real and serious costs, both the human costs and the financial costs, I believe the time has come to have a truly national conversation on the issue of distracted driving. It would be a national conversation that would involve the federal government, the provinces and territories, law enforcement, and stakeholders, with the goal of better coordinating, on a national level, issues around laws, enforcement, penalties, public safety awareness efforts, and the coordination and collection of data, among other things.

Given that I believe that it is time to have a national conversation, I believe that Bill C-373, on its face, moves in that direction. The framework proposed in Bill C-373 would tackle those issues and other issues. I commend the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for the timeliness of bringing this bill forward. I think it is a meritorious bill, one that is worthy of further study and review. To ensure that the study and review of what I think is a good idea happens at committee, I would urge members to pass Bill C-373 at this stage.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if my speaking time were not so short, I would start with a moment of silence for all those who have been killed or left permanently disabled by distracted driving, even though those drivers probably felt perfectly safe right up until the accident happened.

Everyone has a cellphone these days, and studies show that we check our precious phones dozens or even hundreds of times a day. I do not mean to preach or lecture anyone, but how many times have we felt tempted or given in to temptation and checked our texts at the wheel, thinking it was perfectly safe because we were stopped at a red light or driving on an empty highway?

Highway 417, which I take every week, is an example of a place that can sometimes make a driver think that nothing can go wrong because there are no other cars on the road. However, if we can pose a danger to others, we can also pose a danger to ourselves. The problem deserves our attention.

I have a lot of questions about the subject of the bill, and I feel I have to emphasize how important this is in light of the back story shared by the sponsoring member, who has personally lost loved ones to distracted driving. I know we have to take this issue very seriously, and the member has my deepest sympathy under the

circumstances. However, considering the problem caused by alcoholism that we have been fighting for decades, it seems unlikely that we are going to find a miracle solution that will eliminate this problem from one day to the next.

We need to come up with a whole bunch of ways to make everyone who owns a cell phone—not just young people, but people like me, too—aware of the problem. Awareness is absolutely key. As I said earlier, the federal government's scope for action is fairly limited. Over the years, more and more people have gotten the message from awareness campaigns that drinking and driving is criminal. That message has sunk in for all of us, and I hope it has not only sunk in but also helped us change our behaviours.

That is presently not the case for all new cellular technologies. Since the technology is evolving so quickly, I hope that the next stage in automobile technology will resolve some problems such as alcohol-impaired and distracted driving. Perhaps one day we will be passengers in a self-driving car, and we will be able to read our emails and work because the car will do the driving. However, we are not there yet. Although this technology appears to be well on its way, it is not going to be here tomorrow.

This is a private member's bill and I do not want to be partisan. However, I find it difficult to watch a member rise to introduce his bill on such an important issue when his own government, which is the government of all Canadians, is making decisions that I really wonder about. We know that between 2015 and 2017, federal-provincial transfers for road safety were cut by 21%. There should be a degree of consistency in the government's actions if it wants to be seen by the public as consistent and credible and if it wants to make sure that its message is being heard.

Studying distracted driving is very important, but I cannot help thinking about the fact that the government is legalizing cannabis, effective July 1, even though police services still do not have the means to test the consumption of this substance. We have a very reliable means of testing alcohol consumption, and yet we have not managed to completely eliminate alcohol-impaired driving.

•(1800)

As we reflect as open-mindedly as possible on measures to put in place, I ask the member's government to help us out by bringing in consistent measures. I am not saying that we need to reconsider legalizing cannabis, but perhaps we should wait until we have the proper tools in place. Maybe the government needs to provide the funding required to ensure that the bill's objectives can be achieved in real life.

Private Members' Business

As I said, our jurisdictions are shared. Anything that has to do with motor vehicle safety regulation falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. We just saw that this week. The Government of Quebec, which is also aware of this problem and cares about the lives of Quebecers, is going to introduce new measures to review some of the rules, including the possibility of tripling the fines given to people who are caught texting behind the wheel. It is great that all levels of government are well aware of this problem, and I think they truly do wish to collaborate without encroaching on each other's jurisdictions.

What Ottawa can do is take action through the Criminal Code, so the question we must all ask ourselves and reflect on together is this: at what point does distracted driving become a criminal act that should be covered in the Criminal Code? My colleague shared some excellent examples. Everyone is talking about the cellphone, but we have all seen someone look in the mirror while putting on makeup or combing their hair. People engage in all kinds of distracting behaviours that can all have the same tragic outcome.

We also need to ask why the Government of Canada is cutting Transport Canada funding for vehicle safety measures. We all do our best to avoid collisions, but when they happen, we have to be sure the vehicles we are driving are as safe as possible. In recent years, there has been a noticeable decrease in crash test funding. That is squarely in our wheelhouse, and we have the means to take action on it even though the government is clearly not doing so right now.

I would also like to say a few words about the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators. In 2016, the council adopted the road safety strategy 2025. I would like to provide an overview of what the council is proposing because I am concerned about this issue. How will the intent of the bill translate into real action after it is passed? The committee's main job will be to figure that out. I will say right now that I will be voting in favour of this bill at second reading, because I think it is important to send the bill to committee so that we can find meaningful ways of solving the problems that have been raised.

The road safety strategy 2025 seeks to streamline the improvement process across the country through the use of best practices on some specific issues. Here are a few examples: raising public awareness and commitment to road safety; improving communication, co-operation, and collaboration among all stakeholders; enhancing the legislation, regulations, and enforcement; improving road safety information; and supporting research and evaluation. There are others, but I am running out of time.

All of that work is already being done by the council, which brings together representatives from the public sector and from all of the provincial and territorial governments. We must therefore ensure that this bill does something more and that it does not just duplicate work that has already been done. I repeat that we are looking for efficiencies.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that I will be voting in favour of this bill at second reading so that we can examine it as thoroughly as possible. I hope that this bill will have a real impact once it is passed.

● (1805)

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to speak to Bill C-373, an act respecting a federal framework on distracted driving.

Canadians across the country use the road transportation network every day. They travel to work, attend social events, take their kids to school and hockey practice. At the same time, motor vehicle collisions are one of the leading causes of death, injuries, and hospital admissions in Canada. For example, in 2015, 1,858 Canadians were killed and 161,000 Canadians were injured in motor vehicle collisions. In addition to these personal tragedies for families, motor vehicle collisions cost the Canadian economy and the health care system an estimated \$36 billion per year.

I am pleased to say that in Canada, road traffic collisions have substantially declined over the past three decades. To illustrate, between 1980 and 2015, the number of road collisions involving an injury or fatality decreased by 36%. This trend has occurred despite significant increases in the number of licensed drivers, in the number of registered vehicles, and the total kilometres driven by Canadians.

Canadians are also more likely to survive a motor vehicle collision. Between 1980 and 2015, the overall number of persons fatally injured decreased by more than 60%. These decreases are the result of several positive changes, such as improved highway and vehicle design. Of significant importance is the dramatic change in public opinion recognizing that collisions are preventable and that drivers must make safer choices, such as using seatbelts and avoiding risks associated with speeding, distractions, and fatigue.

At the same time as these positive trends have been happening, we are also facing new and evolving challenges. For example, driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs is a growing concern, which is being addressed by my hon. colleague, the Minister of Justice, through Bill C-46. Currently before the Senate, the bill would help address the issue of alcohol and drug-impaired driving while protecting the right of the accused to a fair and impartial hearing.

Recent increases in tragic accidents involving distracted driving have garnered the attention of all levels of government and of the Canadian public. Driving a motor vehicle is a complex task that requires the full attention of the driver at all times. Research has shown that drivers who are distracted do not fully scan the environment looking for potential issues, are slow to identify risks, and then they are slow to react appropriately.

In the last five years, a reported 20% of motor vehicle accident fatalities occurred in collisions where one of the drivers had been distracted or inattentive. Over the same period, 33% of reported motor vehicle injuries occurred in collisions where distraction or inattentiveness was found to be a contributing cause of the crash.

Private Members' Business

The issue of distracted driving is evolving with the pace of technology or faster. For example, smartphones are increasingly popular. Vehicles have also become more sophisticated, providing drivers with real time data from driver assistance programs, other vehicles, and the surrounding infrastructure. In short, life is moving at a faster pace and placing greater demands on our attention, including when we are driving.

This is why the Minister of Transport wrote to his provincial and territorial counterparts last winter to seek nationally consistent enforcement measures and penalties to combat the rapidly rising rate of accidents involving distracted drivers.

In Canada, as my hon. colleague mentioned, road safety is a shared responsibility among federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions, and any actions taken to curb distracted driving cannot be taken in isolation solely by the federal government. Jurisdictions need to work together within their scope of authority to improve road safety in Canada.

● (1810)

Transport Canada is responsible for safety standards for new and imported vehicles, new tires, and child restraints. Justice Canada is responsible for the Criminal Code of Canada in dealing with impaired and dangerous operation of motor vehicles. Provinces and territories are responsible for driver licensing, vehicle registration, and the highway traffic acts, which include laws regarding distracted driving as well as the administration of justice.

To deliver a coordinated approach, the federal government works closely with its provincial and territorial counterparts through the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety and its associated organizations, including the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators. Collectively, we have developed and implemented a number of road safety initiatives that have contributed to significant reductions in deaths and fatalities.

For example, Canada's newest safety plan is Canada's road safety strategy 2025, "Towards Zero: the safest roads in the world". It was launched by the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety in January 2016. It builds on previous accomplishments by raising public awareness of road safety issues; improving communication, co-operation, and collaboration among road safety agencies; enhancing enforcement measures; and improving national road safety data quality and collection. The strategy outlines various measures over a 10-year timeframe to support our vision of moving toward zero deaths and injuries. Road safety strategy 2025 contains a number of promising and proven counter-measures related to distracted driving. For example, education and awareness measures are being used to change public attitudes toward distracted driving. Such change has happened before. With alcohol-impaired driving for example, what was once a common and acceptable behaviour has now become far less common and is socially unacceptable, and our roads are safer because of it.

Governments are also working together to identify international best practices to address distracted driving. At the same time, Transport Canada is working with the provinces and territories and other key stakeholders to develop guidelines related to in-vehicle displays. This initiative responds to a Transportation Safety Board Canada recommendation. Transport Canada also co-chairs a federal-

provincial-territorial working group on distracted driving with British Columbia. Among the various initiatives that have been taken on by this working group, Transport Canada officials are working every day with their provincial and territorial counterparts to assess the implementation of new vehicle technologies that could mitigate the risks and impacts of distracted driving.

In addition, Transport Canada is leading a working group with provinces and territories to improve statistics related to how frequently mobile devices are involved in distracted-driving collisions. The federal government needs to continue to work closely with the provinces and territories on distracted-driving initiatives. Our best successes have occurred when we have worked collaboratively, working together to support policy development, new programs, and efficient and effective enforcement. These initiatives will help Canada change public attitudes toward distracted driving and ensure that more Canadians will get where they are going safely.

● (1815)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to give my maiden speech and will be addressing Bill C-373.

To start off, I would like to thank my family for standing behind me with love and support as I underwent the six month campaign to be the next member of Parliament for Sturgeon River—Parkland. I would like to mention my mother, Rebecca Hyde, and my stepfather Doug Myshaniuk. I would also like to mention my maternal grandparents, Cindy Lou and Graham Hyde, who always stood behind me. I would also like to mention my aunt and uncle, Mark and Melissa Haarsma, who are celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary this week.

Campaigns are not successful unless we have a team behind us. We can have a leader, we can have a member of Parliament, or someone who wants to be one, but without the right people standing with us, we can never get to where we want to go.

I would like to thank a few key players from my campaign team, my extended family, as it were. I would like to thank Murray and Susie Kulak of Stoney Plain for their strong support of me. I would like to thank Fran and Andrew Wolhuis, Tim and Julie Milligan, Bill and Deeny Prinze. Deeny just received her Canadian citizenship two years ago. She moved here from Holland at the age of 4. She raised her family on a farm outside Edmonton. Dinie is a proud Canadian all the way.

I would like to thank my campaign manager Phil Jouanyou, who came out in the final days of my nomination and stayed on to run my campaign. He did an excellent job getting us strong 78% voter support for the Conservatives in Sturgeon River—Parkland.

Private Members' Business

I would not have run if I did not have the support of my mentors, the member for Abbotsford, the former minister of international trade, whom I had the pleasure and honour of working for for two years; and the member of Parliament for St. Albert—Edmonton, who also strongly supported me and urged me to run in the campaign. I would also like to thank the former member of Parliament for St. Albert—Edmonton, John Williams, for being a strong mentor to me and supporting me throughout this campaign.

I would also like to thank some other members: Imelda McLaren, for serving as my volunteer coordinator, and Scott Merrifield and Andrew Benkovitch, who helped put up the signs that were needed to win the campaign.

I would also like to thank a dear mentor of mine Yvon Brochou, a legend of Spruce Grove, who was a warhorse in the days of Don Getty in Alberta and was there for me to provide the sage advice that is necessary to win a campaign.

Finally, I would like to tell the House a short story about how I ran for office. I was interested in running for the seat of Sturgeon River—Parkland, but I did not know when the previous member would resign her seat. Unfortunately, I was on a military exercise in Gagetown, New Brunswick, and did not have access to a phone for two weeks. I finally snuck it out inside a sleeping bag at 4 a.m. on July 13. I remember that day very well. I saw a tweet that the previous member for Sturgeon River—Parkland had indeed resigned.

The next morning I talked to my warrant officer, whom I would like to recognize today, Matt Christensen. I told him I wanted to run to be a member of Parliament, and to his credit, he took me completely seriously and put it up the chain of command. I had the complete support of my commanding officer, my corp staff Captain Hugh Purdon, my commanding officer here with the Governor General's Foot Guards, Lieutenant Colonel Chris Lynam and my mentor Major Gray Shanahan. Without that moral support, I do not think I could have done it.

With that, I would like to start my remarks on the bill in question.

Far too often in the news we hear about another incident or fatality because a driver made a terrible decision to reach for a phone or other device instead of focusing on the road. Distracted driving is a serious problem in my riding and across Canada. The RCMP identifies distracted driving as “a form of impaired driving as a driver's judgment is compromised when they are not fully focused on the road.” Talking on the phone, texting, reading, watching videos, and driver fatigue can all be forms of distracted driving.

Discussion of this topic is particularly timely, as last week was National Impaired Driving Prevention Week.

Distracted driving is similar to impaired driving. Both kill thousands of Canadians and both require a coordinated social and governmental response.

• (1820)

This bill will create a national framework to help determine and prevent distracted driving. It also sets out consultation, review, and reporting requirements in relation to the framework.

I am supportive of this bill, and my Conservative colleagues and I recommend that we make an amendment to include the territories in the wording of the bill. I think that will make it much stronger.

Distraction is a factor in about four million vehicle collisions in North America every year, including 10% of fatal crashes, 18% of injury-related crashes, and 16% of all police-reported motor vehicle traffic crashes. Almost half of all people killed in collisions where a teenager was distracted were the teenagers themselves. No text, no tweet, no call, and no Facebook post is worth a life, and we need to hammer that message home.

Currently, the provinces and territories are responsible for administering their own driving laws and penalties related to distracted driving. This bill will assist them by constructing a framework to prevent distracted driving. The framework will include information and statistics, creating and implementing public implementation programs, better understanding the role of driver assistance technology, and sharing best practices between provinces, municipalities, and the federal government. This will provide support to Canadians on the front line who are tackling this problem.

This is a particularly egregious problem amongst teen drivers, although they alone are not to blame. Distraction was a factor in over half of the moderate to severe crashes, and almost half of all people killed in those crashes were teens. Part of what makes this so tragic is that this is so avoidable.

According to statistics from Alberta Transportation, the number of convictions for distracted driving has risen significantly. In Edmonton alone, distracted driving infractions were up 60% in the first quarter of this year. Nearly 90% of these convictions are related to using hand-held devices while driving and about 26% of all collisions involved the use of a phone. This problem cannot be solved only by increasing penalties and increasing law enforcement resources. Ending distracted driving requires a cultural shift. We need to learn to put the device down and drive.

Earlier this month, I had an opportunity to participate in an announcement by the Parkland County chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving of their 2017 project red ribbon campaign. The campaign provides education on impaired driving and risks. Organizations like MADD exemplify success in combatting the similar problem of impaired driving. Statistics suggest that the efforts made in the fight against impaired driving have saved over 30,000 Canadian lives. Despite this number, Transport Canada estimates that in the last 30 years, nearly 40,000 alcohol-related fatalities have occurred.

Through the work of schools, governments, police forces, and non-profit organizations, people are hearing the message about the consequences in getting behind the wheel while impaired by drugs and alcohol. It is my hope that this bill would help promote more awareness of the serious issue of distracted driving.

Adjournment Proceedings

We must continue to ensure that the authorities have adequate tools to stop distracted driving. More than that, we need to change the culture of constant communication and connectivity. It is acceptable to put the phone down for a while. In fact, when driving it is the law.

More Canadians need to understand that this is a grave issue. Distracted driving can kill. It rips families apart and ruins lives. It is time to stop, think, and put the phone down.

To conclude, my Conservative colleagues and I support these measures to prevent and deter distracted driving.

● (1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a wonderful issue to talk about. I applaud my colleague for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, who has done an outstanding job in recognizing an issue that is important to all of us.

At times, we get legislation that many people who might be watching wonder what it is about, how it relates to them, and so forth. However, with the proposed legislation before us, people can easily identify why it is an important debate that we should be having inside this chamber.

A month or so ago I was driving down Erin Street in Winnipeg between Notre Dame and Portage Avenues. On the right-hand side, I saw a car that was all crunched up. I could tell it had been in a fairly significant accident. Hopefully there were no fatalities. On the window was the message “I was texting” or something of that nature. It had a profound impact when I saw that.

Manitoba Public Insurance has done an outstanding job in promoting the hazards of texting or being preoccupied with some sort of electronic device that usually takes attention away from driving. Manitoba, I think, is a little more progressive in trying to deal with this particular problem.

When cellphones really started to become prevalent, and it was not that long ago, the mid-1990s, there were often individuals talking on their phone and driving. I must admit that I, too, had a cellphone. I would be driving, and all of a sudden, 10 or 15 minutes would have gone by, and I would wonder how I had gotten to a particular point. I do not think that would be surprising to a large number of people. A lot of people can understand and relate to that sort of situation, which I know first-hand.

I first started talking about the dangers of texting and driving probably in the late 1990s. Going into the turn of the century, we recognized more and more just how hazardous it is. There are many car depots with cars that were in accidents, which included fatalities, individuals who were paralyzed, and all sorts of horrific accidents. If we look back, we will find more and more of those accidents were because the driver was distracted.

Here we have legislation that is talking about how we can collect the data, and that we need to look at ways in which the national government might be able to provide some leadership to provincial and territorial jurisdictions. However, as my time is up, I will continue when the bill next comes up.

● (1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The member will have six minutes and 30 seconds when we take up this private member's bill again.

[*Translation*]

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*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, the Auditor General reported that the Phoenix pay system would continue to plague our public servants for years to come. Earlier this week, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement told the government operations committee that the government should mostly have fixed the Phoenix pay system by the end of 2018. Therefore, our public servants are going to have to rely on emergency pay for months, if not years, to come.

The Liberal government has also come to rely on emergency pay as a political explanation for its inaction on Phoenix. For about a year and a half, I have been asking the government why it does not empower managers in departments and agencies to write cheques to employees whom they know are not being paid. The government's answer is that those employees can apply for emergency pay.

For about eight months, I have been asking the government to establish a hotline for MP offices so we can assist constituents who are having problems with Phoenix. The government's answer is that those people who are under stress can apply for emergency pay.

Therefore, I would like to focus this evening's adjournment debate on the question of emergency pay, how it works, what the problems are, and what a solution could be.

At the outset, we need to recognize that the existing emergency pay system is not working. When we hear about federal public servants who lose their homes because of Phoenix, or federal public servants who are applying for provincial social assistance because of Phoenix, it is obvious those people were not able to access emergency pay. One of the reasons for that is glitches within the Phoenix system itself. For example, individuals who are identified within Phoenix as having received an overpayment, whether or not they actually got the money, are automatically ineligible to apply for emergency pay.

Adjournment Proceedings

Even public servants who might qualify for emergency pay are very reluctant to seek it, because they know it is just a loan that has to be repaid, and often public servants are asked to repay the gross amount of that emergency pay, rather than the net amount that they were actually advanced. Therefore, a consequence of receiving emergency pay is often being trapped in a cycle of having to apply for more emergency pay in order to repay the initial emergency payment. Public servants should not be locked into that cycle, and it is quite understandable that they do not want to be.

It strikes me that a very simple solution is, instead of treating emergency pay as a loan that needs to be repaid, to start treating it as an advance on the pay that public servants are owed, so rather than expecting public servants to write the government a cheque to repay those emergency amounts, we should simply debit emergency pay from the future salary that our public servants are owed. I believe this would actually make emergency pay a far more effective safety net for public servants caught up in the Phoenix boondoggle.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to again thank my hon. colleague from Regina—Lewvan, who has once more made this a constructive debate.

However, I would like to correct one of his comments. I do not think he believes that the government has failed to act on the Phoenix pay system, which is certainly not true.

My colleague knows very well that the government has tackled it head-on and established a very clear action plan in order to actually resolve the problems with this pay system, which we inherited from the former government. This pay system was poorly designed and botched from the beginning. Unfortunately, too many of our hard-working public servants are still being affected.

[*English*]

One of the things that has characterized our work, as the member would well know, is our constructive relationship, our proactivity and transparency, and working with our partners in public sector unions, public employee unions, and those who have been most affected. We have worked with them very hard to establish clear priorities with respect to processing some of the backlog. This includes categories of pay transactions such as disability, acting payments, maternity, paternity or parental leaves. We have made great progress on those.

Our emphasis now is on an employee centric approach, where we clean up an entire file or an employee pay situation, which may have two, three, four, or more transactions that are outstanding or are in error and need to be corrected.

With respect to emergency pay, we have worked very hard on that, and I am very proud of this. We have worked very hard, from the Clerk of the Privy Council on down and throughout the government, to ensure that all departments, deputy ministers on down, have no misunderstanding that departments must respond, and respond quickly, to emergency pay situations, situations of hardship or duress. These situations are escalated very quickly. Emergency pay is issued. This emergency pay must be repaid, but only when the

employee's pay situation is resolved and he or she is able to essentially do a one-for-one exchange.

We have shown great sensitivity in working with employees along these lines. I stress, as the deputy minister said the other day, that we send out over 300,000 biweekly paycheques in every pay period, and we do so with great precision. The problems associated with the Phoenix pay system often come when employees have other circumstances, such as overtime, shift work, and I will not go through all the categories because my time is expiring.

We take emergency pay and ensuring employees are not left in situations of hardship very seriously. We approach it with great compassion, and are happy to do so.

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary tried to suggest that the existing emergency pay system was working properly. There are blatant examples that it is not working properly, of people losing their homes, of people applying for welfare. We need to get those facts on the record.

Even if the emergency pay system were working well, why do we expect public servants to repay that money to the government? Why are we not content to accept that money as an advance on pay public servants are owed? I would be very interested in hearing the parliamentary secretary's comments on this. What is his objection to simply debiting the emergency pay from the salary public servants receive, if and when they actually receive it?

It seems to me that this would make the system work much more smoothly for public servants who are in need.

• (1840)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I think we are actually saying the same thing. Emergency pay obviously has to be repaid, but it is only expected when the employee's pay file or pay transactions are properly executed.

We have demonstrated that in situations of catastrophe, we have rapidly escalated those issues and resolve them. I would encourage the member and all colleagues that if they know of people who are in a very bad way with respect to their personal situation because of problems associated with the Phoenix pay system, to make us aware of such circumstances.

TAXATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in October, I asked the Minister of Finance how he could justify taxing the passive investment income of Darrel and Kathy, farmers in my riding, at a rate a third higher than he would tax the millionaire owners of Morneau Shepell. Apparently, he could not. For all his talk of tax fairness, it took the voices of thousands of Canadian farmers, doctors, and small business owners to convince him to not take 73% of their passive investments.

Adjournment Proceedings

The finance minister and the Prime Minister claim that they are only raising taxes on the wealthy. However, we know that this is not true. Under the Liberals, over 80% of hard-working middle-class Canadians are paying, on average, \$800 more per family. The finance minister claimed that he would not raise taxes on small businesses but later admitted that his tax plan would do just that.

Time and time again, the Liberals have been caught trying to take more money out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians. Whether they are raising taxes on local businesses, going after health and dental benefits, or even trying to tax fast-food workers for their discounted burgers, the Liberals are not to be trusted. There is a reason for this. This is the way they think. They believe that success is to be frowned upon, to be discouraged. When the Liberals say “rich”, what they actually mean is “taxpayer”. A small business owner is not able to simply jet off to a previously forgotten French villa, unlike some members on the other side.

The government would rather see small business owners scrape by, or even close up shop, than make a decent profit for the hours of hard, honest work they put into keeping their businesses open. The results of its policies are clear to anyone who has had to live under them for any considerable length of time. As small businesses are taxed at ever higher rates, they begin to close up shop, and in the process, their employees lose their jobs. Their policies ensure that those struggling to make ends meet struggle even more, and it seems that the Liberals are fine with that. To paraphrase the Right Hon. Margaret Thatcher, they would rather the poor be poorer, provided the rich cease to be rich.

This is why Canadians do not trust them. This is why our Conservative caucus has called for the resignation of the Minister of Finance. It is not just that he cannot be trusted to be open and transparent with his own finances; he cannot be trusted to be open and transparent with the finances of millions of Canadians.

The Liberals will claim that they are for the middle class. If this is so, when will they stop trying to tax them into poverty?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first word that comes to my mind is, “wow”. The member across the way sure knows how to read off the Conservatives' talking points. Who cares if they are true or not? That seems to be the attitude in the speech we just heard. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have a government that understands and appreciates the value of small business. We have a government that understands and appreciates the importance of the middle class and those aspiring to be part of it, and our policies reflect that. It is only the Conservative Party that consistently rejects it.

There have been decreases in the small business tax and we committed to a further decrease in the small business tax. We created hundreds of millions of dollars of disposable income for nine million-plus Canadians. We increased the Canada child benefit, putting millions of dollars into the pockets of individuals who need it the most, children and those who care for children, lifting thousands of children out of poverty. We have invested in seniors. What do members think people are doing with that disposable income? They are spending it, and by spending it, they are creating jobs.

This government has created close to 500,000 jobs in two years. Harper created close to 1.2 million, mostly part-time, jobs in 10 years. Look at what we have done in two years, with a projection during the last federal election that the economy was not going to do well. Liberals disagree. We have a different approach, and that approach is supporting Canada's small businesses. Those are the types of policies that we have created.

There is Conservative spin, which I refer to as the unholy alliance between the Conservatives and the NDP, and they try to turn it into a negative when, in fact, this is good news. Jobs are being created and the economy is moving forward, the degree to which is far greater than most other countries in the western world. These are the types of policies that we are seeing. What do we have as a direct result? We have the official opposition working with the New Democrats in a persistent character assassination of the Minister of Finance. It does not matter what the Minister of Finance does. Whether it is the special tax on Canada's wealthiest or the tax break for Canada's middle class, it does not matter. The Conservatives and the NDP constantly criticize the Minister of Finance.

Now they are giving up because they know just how well our policies are being received by Canadians, so they are in the gutter. They are in the gutter, taking personal shots at the Minister of Finance, even though all members in the chamber have an obligation to report their assets to the Ethics Commissioner, and that is exactly what the Minister of Finance has done. There are individuals on both sides of the House that the commissioner looks into. However, they would rather stay in the gutter, take personal shots, and continue the character assassination of the finance minister, to which I say shame on them. They should be focusing on providing constructive criticism of the government, with ideas that they believe would help Canada's economy.

● (1845)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the Liberals care more about the success of some than they do about helping everyone. The Liberals will always engage in the politics of division. Meanwhile, the Conservatives on this side of the House will fight for fair treatment for everyone.

While the Liberals like to take credit for the positives of the economy, as we have just heard, are they willing to take responsibility for the negatives as well? When their \$19-billion deficit has to be paid off by our children, will they take responsibility for that? How about the deficit after that? Will they take responsibility when small businesses close up shop due to the minister's ill-conceived and ever-increasing taxes? Somehow I doubt it.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, has the Conservative opposition taken responsibility for the \$150 billion that they contributed, the Stephen Harper contribution to Canada's debt? The Conservatives like to think that they understand economic finances, how to get the economy moving forward, and the management of government books, but when we look at the previous 10 years of the Harper administration, I would challenge members opposite on that point. We do not need to take advice from the Conservatives with regard to deficits.

What I want is opposite to what the member just finished saying. She said "the success of some". The success of some is fairly large. All Canadians have benefited by policy implementation on a wide variety of things, and we will continue to move forward to give more strength to Canada's middle class.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the 2016 census, released a few weeks ago, Canada's indigenous population has grown 42.5% since 2006, or four times faster than the non-indigenous population, making it the fastest growing population in Canada.

We already knew that there was an immense need for housing among indigenous peoples, but the 2016 census confirms that the housing conditions for these populations are still unacceptable.

One in five indigenous persons, or nearly 325,000 people, lived in a housing unit in need of major repair in 2016. By way of comparison, that number is roughly four times greater than that for the non-indigenous population. Despite a very slight decline in the need for repairs, it is clear that a lot of work remains to be done.

In Inuit Nunangat, the traditional territory where 73% of Canada's Inuit live, one in three people live in a housing unit in need of major repair. The situation is especially unacceptable because the climate the Inuit live in requires special housing conditions.

With regard to first nations, 44% of existing housing units on reserve require major repairs, which is more than in 2011. For first nations members living off reserve, 14% live in housing that requires major repairs, compared to only 6% for the non-indigenous population. That is more than double.

Things are not much better when it comes to overcrowding. The 2016 census showed that over 18% of indigenous people live in homes that are too small for the size of their household according to the national occupancy standard established by CMHC.

By way of comparison, 8% of the non-indigenous population lived in similar conditions. Nearly one-quarter of first nations members and two out of five Inuit live in overcrowded housing conditions.

We need look no further to see that the government, which is responsible for indigenous housing, needs to do a lot more to ensure that first nations, Inuit, and Métis people are no longer second-class citizens. The figures speak for themselves.

However, it is not like I learned anything new from the minister today. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada knew all about this reality by early 2016—although I should point out that being aware of a reality is one thing, and doing something about it is another.

In early 2016, in response to a question on the Order Paper from my colleague from Timmins—James Bay, the department acknowledged that, and I quote:

...the housing shortage on reserve is expected to rise to approximately 115,000 units by 2031.

That was before we got the real figures on the increase in the indigenous population. On the issue of overcrowded housing, the department acknowledged that, and again I quote:

...20,000 units need to be built on reserve in order to reduce the average number of persons by household to four people per home...and 81,000 houses are needed to reduce it to the 2.5 Canadian average.

In answer to a question I asked on October 30, the Minister of Indigenous Services had this to say:

I am pleased to report to the House that today 8,800 units have already been either built or are in the process of being built and renovated.

Really? In other words, the department knows just how many houses need to be built or renovated, but it tells me it is only working on 8,800 new or existing housing units. That is not what I would call very ambitious, and it clearly shows that the government has no plan.

The NDP has been calling for a targeted strategy to be put in place in partnership with indigenous peoples to address urgent housing needs.

However, the national housing strategy announced last week did nothing to address the specific problems that indigenous persons face. Why?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Rusnak (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the quality of housing directly impacts one's quality of life. That is why, under our government, we have made indigenous community housing a priority. In the spirit of a respectful and inclusive relationship, the federal government has been collaborating with first nations since May 2016 to develop a long-term approach to on-reserve housing. Our government is continuing its work with the Assembly of First Nations to develop a further engagement strategy, centred on a nation-to-nation dialogue, to reform on-reserve housing.

Budget 2016 invested \$4.6 billion over five years to support community infrastructure in indigenous communities. This included \$554.3 million over two years, beginning in 2016-17, to address urgent housing needs for first nation people living on reserve. As of June 30, 2017, overall housing investments are resulting in the construction, renovation, retrofit, and servicing of 8,800 housing units in first nation communities. We know that this does not come close to the unacceptable gap that exists. It is just a start.

Adjournment Proceedings

In the minister's mandate letter, she was tasked to “leverage the ingenuity and understanding of Indigenous Peoples as well as experts from the private sector, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments and international expertise on service delivery.”

We are working closely with indigenous peoples and other important partners to promote innovative approaches to equitable infrastructure in this country. Budget 2017 proposes \$4 billion over 10 years, starting in 2018-19, to build and approve housing and other indigenous community infrastructure. To maximize the benefits and long-term sustainability of these proposed investments, funding allocations will be determined in partnership with indigenous peoples from coast to coast.

Additionally, it should be noted that addressing the housing crisis in Canada's north is an urgent priority, one our government takes very seriously. We have invested \$80 million over two years that will be distributed among each of the regions in the Inuit territory. Our government is working with ITK and Inuit land claims governments and other organizations that represent beneficiaries, from all four regions of the Inuit territory, through the recently established Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee.

We have also committed to co-develop a distinction-based Métis housing strategy and to improve Métis access to the delivery and control of affordable and social housing. Indigenous Services, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and Métis nation officials are co-developing a housing strategy that will meet the needs of Métis nation citizens.

We continue to engage with first nations, Inuit, and Métis partners to develop distinction-based housing strategies, in addition to the national housing strategy, which benefit many indigenous people living in urban centres.

Our government believes that all Canadians deserve a safe, secure, and healthy home. We are committed to closing the unacceptable gap for indigenous peoples. We are working in partnership with indigenous peoples, communities, and organizations to make this vision a reality.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the government has prepared a budget that is spread over 11 years, but there are immediate needs, especially for indigenous communities.

In 11 years, it will be 2028, almost when the department forecasts that 115,000 units will be needed, just on reserves alone. Furthermore, 81,000 units are needed right now for indigenous people to enjoy the same housing conditions as the general population, in terms of the number of occupants.

Money allocated to housing is more than just an expense; it is an investment. For this investment to be worthwhile, the government needs to immediately allocate the resources needed to renovate the housing units that are in need. The longer it waits, the more this will cost. The government needs to have a plan, a strategy, and it needs to take bold action now.

If this issue is such a priority for this government, when will it finally introduce a targeted strategy to address the housing needs of indigenous peoples?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Rusnak: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we continue to engage with first nation, Inuit, and Métis nation partners to develop distinction-based housing strategies, in addition to the national housing strategy.

Our government is continuing its work with the AFN to develop a strategy to reform on-reserve housing. We are working with CMHC and Métis nation officials on a housing strategy that will meet the needs of Métis nation citizens. We are working with the ITK and Inuit land claims governments and organizations on an Inuit housing strategy.

Our government believes that every Canadian deserves to live in a safe, secure, and healthy environment. We are working to close the unacceptable housing gaps for indigenous people.

Thank you. *Merci. Meegwetch.*

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*English*]

Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, November 30, 2017

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS	
Bill C-352—Canada Shipping Act, 2001	
Vote on the Designation of an Item	
The Speaker	15775
Point of Order	
Ethics—Speaker's Ruling	
The Speaker	15775
ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
Commissioner of Lobbying	
The Speaker	15776
Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Lamoureux	15776
Certificates of Nomination	
Mr. Lamoureux	15776
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Hehr	15776
Committees of the House	
National Defence	
Mr. Fuhr	15776
Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Bagnell	15776
Environment and Sustainable Development	
Mrs. Schulte	15776
Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics	
Mr. Zimmer	15776
Indian Act	
Mr. Lamoureux	15776
(Motion agreed to)	15777
Committees of the House	
Citizenship and Immigration	
Ms. Rempel	15777
Motion for concurrence	15777
Mr. Wrzesnewskyj	15780
Mr. Julian	15780
Ms. Gladu	15780
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	15781
Mr. Cormier	15781
Ms. Rempel	15783
Ms. Kwan	15783
Ms. Gladu	15783
Mr. Lamoureux	15784
Mr. Nantel	15784
Ms. Kwan	15784
Mr. Vaughan	15787
Ms. Rempel	15787
Mr. Sarai	15788
Mr. Lamoureux	15788
Mr. Saroya	15790
Ms. Gladu	15791
Mr. Kmiec	15791
Mr. Garrison	15791
Mr. Saroya	15791
Mr. Cullen	15793
Mr. Lamoureux	15793
Mr. Kmiec	15793
Mr. Nantel	15795
Ms. Rempel	15795
Mr. Maguire	15795
Mr. Nantel	15797
Mr. Lamoureux	15797
Mr. Obhrai	15798
Mr. Wrzesnewskyj	15799
Mr. Garrison	15799
Ms. Gladu	15799
Division deemed demanded and deferred	15801
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lamoureux	15801
Request for Emergency Debate	
Davie Shipyard	
Ms. Pauzé	15801
The Deputy Speaker	15801
GOVERNMENT ORDERS	
Indian Act	
Bill S-3. Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments	15801
Mr. Cullen	15801
Ms. Jones	15804
Mr. Viersen	15804
Mr. Bossio	15805
Mr. Garrison	15805
Mr. Lamoureux	15806
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS	
Official Languages	
Mr. Beaulieu	15806
Movember	
Ms. Tassi	15806
Blood Donation	
Mr. Webber	15807
Housing	
Mr. Virani	15807
The Environment	
Ms. Ramsey	15807
World AIDS Day	
Mr. Blair	15807

Feast of St. Andrew	
Mr. Abouttaif	15808
Jewish Refugee Day	
Mr. Housefather	15808
Senate 150 Medal	
Mr. Boissonnault	15808
Energy Sector	
Mr. Warkentin	15808
Residential Schools	
Ms. Jones	15808
Yellow Brick House	
Mr. Jowhari	15809
November 30	
Mr. Kmiec	15809
Eid Milad-un-Nabi	
Mr. Dhaliwal	15809
Nanjing Massacre Commemorative Day	
Ms. Kwan	15809
Jewish Refugee Day	
Mr. Sweet	15809
Canadian Tourism Awards	
Mrs. Lockhart	15810

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ethics	
Mr. Poilievre	15810
Mr. Trudeau	15810
Mr. Poilievre	15810
Mr. Trudeau	15810
Mr. Poilievre	15810
Mr. Trudeau	15810
Mr. Rayes	15810
Mr. Trudeau	15811
Mr. Rayes	15811
Mr. Trudeau	15811
Mr. Caron	15811
Mr. Trudeau	15811
Mr. Caron	15811
Mr. Trudeau	15811
Mr. Caron	15811
Mr. Trudeau	15811
Mr. Caron	15811
Mr. Trudeau	15812
Mr. Strahl	15812
Mr. Morneau	15812
Mr. Strahl	15812
Mr. Morneau	15812
Mr. Poilievre	15812
Mr. Morneau	15812
Mr. Poilievre	15812
Mr. Morneau	15812
Mr. Poilievre	15813
Mr. Morneau	15813

Naming of Member	
The Speaker	15813
Ethics	
Mr. Morneau	15813
Mr. Poilievre	15813
Mr. Morneau	15813
Mr. Boulerice	15813
Mr. Morneau	15813
Mr. Cullen	15813
Mr. Morneau	15814
Mr. Bernier	15814
Mr. Morneau	15814
Mr. Bernier	15814
Mr. Morneau	15814
Mrs. Block	15814
Mr. Morneau	15814
Mr. Brassard	15814
Mr. Morneau	15814
Indigenous Affairs	
Ms. Malcolmson	15814
Ms. Bennett	15815
Mr. Saganash	15815
Ms. Bennett	15815
Human Rights	
Mr. Fonseca	15815
Mr. Goodale	15815
Ethics	
Mr. Deltell	15815
Mr. Morneau	15815
Mr. Deltell	15815
Mr. Morneau	15815
Ms. Rempel	15816
Mr. Morneau	15816
Ms. Rempel	15816
Mr. Morneau	15816
Natural Resources	
Mr. Stewart	15816
Ms. Rudd	15816
Status of Women	
Ms. Kwan	15816
Ms. Joly	15816
Ethics	
Mr. Poilievre	15816
Mr. Morneau	15817
Mr. Poilievre	15817
Mr. Morneau	15817
Mr. Poilievre	15817
Mr. Morneau	15817
Indigenous Affairs	
Mr. Bossio	15817
Mrs. Philpott	15817
Ethics	
Mr. Poilievre	15817
Mr. Morneau	15817

Media Industry	
Mr. Nantel	15818
Ms. Joly	15818
Status of Women	
Mrs. Nassif	15818
Mr. Duguid	15818
Ethics	
Mr. Poilievre	15818
Mr. Morneau	15818
Mr. Thériault	15818
Mr. Lamoureux	15818
Mr. Thériault	15818
Mr. Lamoureux	15818
Business of the House	
Mr. Strahl	15819
Mr. Lamoureux	15819
(Motion agreed to)	15819

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Indian Act	
Bill S-3. Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments	15819
Mr. Lamoureux	15819
Business of Supply	
Mr. Brison	15820
Indian Act	
Bill S-3. Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments	15820
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	15820
Ms. Benson	15821
Mrs. Caesar-Chavannes	15821
Mr. Viersen	15821
Ms. Gladu	15822
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	15823
Ms. Jones	15823
Mr. Viersen	15824
Mr. Julian	15825
Mr. Whalen	15825
Mr. Whalen	15825

Mr. Viersen	15827
Mr. Tabbara	15827
Ms. Malcolmson	15827
Mr. Ouellette	15827
Mr. Viersen	15829
Ms. Jones	15829
Ms. Rempel	15829
Ms. Jones	15831
Ms. Malcolmson	15831
Mr. Waugh	15832
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	15833
Ms. Jones	15833
Ms. Malcolmson	15833
Motion	15835
Ms. Jones	15835
Mr. Stewart	15835
Division deemed requested and deferred	15836

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Federal Framework on Distracted Driving Act	
Mr. Eyolfson	15837
Bill C-373. Second reading	15837
Mr. Kitchen	15839
Mr. Aubin	15839
Mr. Cooper	15839
Mr. Aubin	15840
Mrs. McCrimmon	15841
Mr. Lloyd	15842
Mr. Lamoureux	15844

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. Weir	15844
Mr. MacKinnon	15845
Taxation	
Mrs. Block	15845
Mr. Lamoureux	15846
Indigenous Affairs	
Ms. Boutin-Sweet	15847
Mr. Rusnak	15847

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