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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 1, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 1, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, two reports of the delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

The first is respecting its participation at the meeting of the Cooperation and Development Committee of the APF, held on Réunion Island, France, from March 2 to 4, 2017.

The second is respecting its participation at the meeting of the APF parliamentary network on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, held in Rabat, Morocco, on November 21 and 22, 2017.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

LIAISON COMMITTEE

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 107(3), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Liaison Committee, entitled “Committee Activities and Expenditures: April 1, 2017—December 31, 2017”.

[*Translation*]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 54th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The Committee advises that, pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the Subcommittee on Private Members’ Business met to consider the items added to the order of precedence on Monday, February 5, 2018, and recommended that the items listed herein, which it has

determined should not be designated non-votable, be considered by the House.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the report is deemed adopted.

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to table a petition signed by many concerned constituents who are calling on the government to remove the discriminatory attestation requirement from the Canada summer jobs application.

The attestation prevents youth across the country from gaining invaluable work experience because of beliefs that may be different from the political agenda of the government of the day.

TEMPORARY RESIDENT VISAS

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by several hundred people that was initiated by a resident of my riding of Hochelaga. Her name is Natalia Lepleyskaya. I would like to thank her for her very hard work.

Between November 4, 2015, and December 6, 2016, over one million temporary resident visa applications were denied by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. According to a World Economic Forum report, Canada ranks 120th out of 136 countries with respect to visa-granting policies.

This petition is calling on the federal government to improve and simplify the temporary resident visa application process by making it transparent, simple, fast, and differentiated.

[*Translation*]

BICYCLE PATHS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to present a petition signed by nearly 2,000 people who are very concerned because they want to be able to ride their bicycles year-round. We talk about ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote active transportation, and encourage people to move to stay healthy, and yet bicycle paths on federal bridges are not cleared in the winter.

Privilege

These 2,000 people want all bicycle paths on federal bridges to be cleared year-round. I am pleased to table this petition on their behalf today.

[English]

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition from hundreds of residents in my riding of Battlefords—Lloydminster.

The petitioners are calling upon the Prime Minister to withdraw the attestation requirement for applicants to the Canada summer jobs program, and to defend fundamental freedoms of conscience, thought, and belief. It is important to them that Canadian charter rights are protected.

● (1010)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two related petitions. Petition e-1264, signed by 531 Canadians, reminds the House that approximately 25% of Canada's population are non-believers, and calls upon the House to request that the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, together with the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, investigate systemic discrimination against non-believers in Canada's laws and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, petition e-763, signed by 1,536 Canadians, calls upon the House of Commons to repeal the religious exemption regarding hate propaganda found in paragraph 319(3)(b) of the Criminal Code of Canada. This paragraph permits the incitement of hatred against identifiable groups if the incitement is an expression of "opinion based on a belief in a religious text".

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to table a petition on behalf of coastal residents to call on the government to create a national strategy to combat ocean plastics and to create a fund for ongoing cleanups for marine debris and emergency cleanups for marine debris.

The United Nations has said that plastic will soon outweigh fish, and that is what we are on course to do by 2050. The petitioners call on the government to regulate single-use plastics, stormwater outfalls, and microplastic pollution; create a national strategy to clean up derelict fishing gear; extend producer responsibility; and address the root problem to redesign the plastics economy, as well as education, outreach, and beach cleanups. Our oceans are precious. In coastal British Columbia, we rely on the ocean for our food security, economic security, and recreation.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ACCESS TO BRIEFING ON BILL C-69

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to add my thoughts on the question of privilege that was raised earlier this week by the hon. member for Abbotsford. I would like to thank him for his intervention on Monday as it does raise important questions about the work we do in this place on behalf of Canadians.

This type of event, in various incarnations, has been the subject of numerous questions of privilege over the years during my time as a member of Parliament, and I know how hard it is for members to establish the burden of proof required by the Speaker to rule that there is a prima facie breach of our privileges here.

I would argue that the prima facie, or first glance, impression that I have been given, based solely on the remarks of the member for Abbotsford, is that there is a case for you, Mr. Speaker, to rule that the minister or her staff have shown contempt for the House and its members.

One point that I found particularly enlightening from the member's remarks is that the Chair does not actually have to find that members have been obstructed or impeded from doing their work. In fact, the Chair only has to believe at first glance that the incident in question is an offence against the dignity of members. The description of events from the member should be taken at face value. You, Mr. Speaker, and just about every Speaker before you, have cited the convention that MP statements should be treated as facts.

The member went out of his way to ask the minister's office if he could attend a briefing on an important bill that is before the House. He was denied access for no other reason besides the fact that he is an MP. I submit that the dignity of the member and the House in which he holds membership was offended by that action. I am offended on his behalf as well, and I trust that you, the duly elected guardian of our collective dignity, will be offended too.

Finally, I have to say that I am really saddened by the fact that the minister will not simply apologize for the event in question. The approach of her department in this case is obviously problematic. Perhaps if she reconsiders and issues a sincere apology, even at a later date, on behalf of herself and her department, the member for Abbotsford will consider the matter closed, but if she does not, Mr. Speaker, I think that you will have no choice but to rule favourably on the member for Abbotsford's claim that an offence occurred against the dignity of the House and its members.

•(1015)

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Abbotsford on February 26, 2018, with respect to the briefings that were provided for Bill C-69. I contend that in fact no breach of privilege has been committed.

The crux of my hon. colleague's argument is that the minister "impeded every single member of this House", and that someone "tried to withhold information from the House".

Mr. Speaker, I will refer to the decision given by your predecessor on March 3, 2014, regarding a technical briefing from the minister of state for democratic institutions. In that case, the Speaker ruled with relation to the technical briefing, where deficient interpretation was considered by a member as "preventing parliamentarians from participating fully in subsequent debate on the bill". The member went on to note that the protection of the official languages in the House is fundamental to ensuring equality among all members.

In his decision, the Speaker at the time referenced two rulings. The first, by Speaker Bosley on May 15, 1985, can be found at page 4769 of Debates, and states:

I think it has been recognized many times in the House that a complaint about the actions or inactions of government Departments cannot constitute a question of parliamentary privilege.

The second ruling, delivered February 7, 2013, which can be found on page 13869 of Debates, states:

It is beyond the purview of the Chair to intervene in departmental matters or to get involved in government processes, no matter how frustrating they may appear to be to the member.

I believe there are similarities with regard to departmental matters and these rulings are pertinent. I will also note that the bill was not debated in the House until the following Wednesday, after its introduction, which means the member for Abbotsford had plenty of time to prepare his intervention for second reading debate.

While the member may feel that he was disadvantaged in some way, I do not agree with his assertion that the minister or her staff intentionally tried to impede his ability to carry out his duties. If the member feels that he needs additional briefings, I can assure him that they will be provided, as has been the practice of our government.

The member for Abbotsford was right in acknowledging that his intervention "does not fall strictly within one of the specifically defined privileges or confines of a proceeding in the House of Commons".

This is not a legitimate question of privilege. It is a well-established convention that the Chair's role is confined to proceedings before the House and of Parliament. Although I appreciate my hon. colleague's devotion to the respect of parliamentary privilege, I will reiterate that the situation at hand does not constitute a *prima facie* question of privilege.

[Translation]

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé and the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for their interventions. I

Business of Supply

will look into the matter and come back to the House with a ruling in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, organizations that engage in non-political non-activist work, such as feeding the homeless, helping refugees, and giving kids an opportunity to go to camp, should be able to access Canada Summer Jobs funding regardless of their private convictions and regardless of whether or not they choose to sign the application attestation.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with our House opposition leader.

I rise today to begin a debate on an opposition motion that calls out the Liberal government and the Prime Minister for their unconscionable attack on the sacred rights of Canadians to think for themselves, express their beliefs, and practise their faith without intervention or judgment from the government.

Last year, Canadians learned of an ominous new development in the way Canada summer jobs grants would be allocated. This is a very important program for all our constituents, regardless of region or our parties. These funds go to community organizations to allow them to hire summer students. This is critical. These organizations offer important services to their communities. They help refugees and newly settled immigrants to Canada. They provide summer camps for kids. They offer to help the disabled and the most vulnerable in our society.

For years, they have done this without intervention from any government, until December of 2017. That was when Canadians learned of this new attestation now required for applicants to this program. The attestation requires applicants to endorse the political and ideological views of the Liberal Party and of the Prime Minister personally. This is totally unacceptable in our free and democratic society. As Canadians, we enjoy and cherish our fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech and freedom of conscience.

The government plays a vital role in protecting these and other rights and freedoms that we enjoy as Canadians. Every government in Canada chooses its own priorities, which are meant to help Canadians realize their full potential. What every Canadian government should have in common is the understanding that they should respect these fundamental charter rights and put these rights ahead of political point scoring.

That is why the Prime Minister's decision to require all groups seeking support from the Canada summer jobs program to sign an attestation declaring support for the ideological views of the Liberal Party is simply appalling. It is why Conservatives are clearly and forcefully expressing our opposition to this Liberal values test being imposed on Canadians.

Business of Supply

Canadians expect their government to respect the diversity of opinion and belief that exists in our country. However, while the Prime Minister talks a lot about respecting that diversity, his actions tell a very different story. He chose not to listen to the many community organizations that make good use of this program and that will now be unable to provide their services this year.

Among those who will have to cut back are organizations that provide aid to refugees, run daycare programs for kids with disabilities, and offer help to at-risk youth. This is yet another example of how the government is attacking the very people it claims to help. Conservatives believe Canadians know better than the government about what is good for them. We listened and consulted with community organizations across the country, because we believe Canadians have a right to hold their own beliefs, and express themselves without fear of judgment from the federal government. No one has the right to prevent others from advocating or expressing their most deeply held personal beliefs.

The responses we received have been swift and clear. From church groups in the Maritimes and Muslim organizations in Toronto to services for the homeless in Alberta and summer camps in Vancouver Island, we have heard repeatedly how this policy will hurt local institutions and those seeking their help. Many have already been forced to make a tough decision and refuse to apply for the Canada summer jobs program this year. With the deadline passed, other groups now worry that more government programs will be subject to this values test.

Here are some of these groups' reactions to this terrible policy. For example, The Mustard Seed in Calgary offers social services for the homeless. Its CEO, Stephen Wile, said that because of this attestation, up to 300 youth in Calgary will not get to experience what it is like to work with the homeless and foster a compassionate heart.

Lindsey Villages in Ajax provides skills training to children with autism and serves as a home to those whose parents cannot afford to care for them. Dr. Rondo Thomas, their president, said that the direction this government is going is very concerning and that he is now having to consider shutting down Lindsey Villages, a home that cares for autistic children and provides them with skills training.

• (1020)

Kerber Applied Research Inc. is a Hamilton biotech company that is developing innovative cancer treatment technology. Its president, Tom Kerber, said that budgets are tight and the help from Canada summer jobs is critical to his company's efforts to find life-saving innovative cancer treatments. However, he refused to enable any sort of government-imposed values test, as this is not a precedent he wanted to allow.

There are so many groups that have spoken out, and the Conservatives will be sharing their stories this morning.

The Prime Minister has made the wrong decision and the grassroots organizations that have been hurt by it need to make their voices heard. Organizations applying for public programs should not be denied access to them solely because the Prime Minister does not share their values and beliefs. It makes one wonder if the Prime Minister will apply his values test to Canadians receiving other

services, including organizations that receive charitable status from the Canada Revenue Agency. This prospect represents a fundamental attack on the charter rights of Canadians. It has no place in a tolerant, diverse, multicultural society.

The Prime Minister should not get his ideological veto over grants for summer jobs. The defence of these rights is what has made Canada a free, open, and tolerant country, a home for people seeking freedom from around the world. We should never compromise these freedoms. However, today too many on the government side are ready to take away these freedoms to score political points. The victims of these organizations are trying to do good in our communities, and the students are looking for work over the summer. This just is not fair.

I implore my government colleagues to support this motion and make their voices heard on behalf of all local organizations in their constituencies that will lose out because of this unfair, un-Canadian policy. It is time for all of us to speak up for the most cherished freedoms.

• (1025)

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know this issue raises a lot of concerns. It becomes an issue of passion. It becomes an issue of faith. However, there is a lot of misinformation that has been put out there by the opposition. They call it the “ideological views” of the Liberal Party of Canada. What this gets behind is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What we are behind is a constitutionally protected right for a woman to access safe abortion services if she chooses.

I was wondering if the hon. member could speak to the part of the charter that requires a government to fund an organization that seeks to undermine someone else's charter rights.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, I will remind my colleague to go back to the motion that we presented today. It talks about non-political, non-activist groups. I am talking today about the organizations in our communities that are impacted.

I want to bring up a topic with respect to the area in London where I am. The archbishop there in charge of the diocese has spoken to me, and our Liberal MPs have not even taken the time to reach out and contact him after they have made such a huge decision in our area to not apply for Canada summer jobs.

In my own riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London, there are housing organizations that are not going to be able to receive this funding. It is not because they are advocating against the beliefs this member is speaking of. It is because of their internal religious beliefs that they cannot sign something. I too would not be able to sign this attestation, and many of the businesses we have heard from have said the government has no business knowing what their beliefs are when it comes to Canada summer jobs. If we look at the Charter of Rights, we have the right to religious beliefs, we have the right to freedom, and there are different ways of doing that.

Our point today is that this is not what our motion is about. Therefore, I would ask the member to not try to dictate around it.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I also had an opportunity to discuss this with representatives from the diocese in my riding. Listening to my colleague, I was thinking about the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which has been protecting all Canadians for 35 years. We all embraced it 35 years ago.

Does my colleague not think that the reason we are discussing this motion here today is that the wording of the attestation requirement for the Canada summer jobs application was vague? The government should have been much clearer, because many organizations felt excluded.

• (1030)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, I would really like to thank my colleague, because that is exactly what we have been saying, right from the beginning.

When this attestation came out, it came to the attention of our Conservative caucus, not from within our caucus but from the people who were reading these applications, who said they did not understand. It took a long time, not just a day or two, for the Minister of Labour to respond, and at that time, the Liberals did not change the wording of the attestation. It is fine to have a dialogue in one page, but that was not what the person was signing. They were signing an attestation that had the exact same wording as what these many concerned citizens were concerned about in the first place. The issue was not, “We’ve come up with some understanding language, and here’s a description of what we mean”. They are signing a document that people find is binding, and true to their beliefs, they will not sign it.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the supplemental information that defines what the attestation says makes it very clear. This has nothing to do with beliefs. This is not about beliefs. This is solely about activities. The attestation makes that clear, and there are examples in the attestation that set that out.

Has she not read the supplemental information that makes the attestation very clear?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, the bottom line is that we are not signing the supplementary; we’re signing the attestation. If we were signing the supplementary that would be one thing.

You can laugh all you want, but I have organizations in my community that are not going to be providing day care, that are not going to be out there giving out the food we need, and for people to sit there and bicker that this is not happening, I call BS on that. This is happening in our communities, and you guys better open your eyes. We are talking about—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I just want to remind the member that I was not laughing at it, so she is to make sure her comments come directly to the Chair and not to the individual members or the government.

Could we have a very brief finish on that please?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, the bottom line is that the Liberals have come out with this additional information, but people are signing an attestation. For many people, that is like signing an agreement where they say this is not what they believe in. You are asking people to sign something they do not agree with.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Again, I want to remind the member that she might want to choose her words differently, because she just indicated that I would want them to sign.

Resuming debate, the official opposition House leader.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to rise today and speak on behalf the good people from the riding of Portage—Lisgar. They are people who have done so much to help young people get jobs, and done so much for people who are in poverty, people with mental illnesses, people who have been using the Canada summer jobs program in order to do these things. As I said, I am rising to speak on their behalf today and am happy to do it.

It was not very long ago in this House that the Prime Minister rose and issued a formal apology to the LGBTQ community for what happened during the 1950s to the 1990s when the government of the day decided that the government would be telling a certain group of Canadians what they could think, what they could feel, how they could live. If what they did did not line up with what the government of the day wanted or what might even have been politically correct in that day, those individuals were cut off from being part of the government process. They were cut off from their jobs. They were cut off from taxpayers' dollars that would have been paying them to do those jobs. They were cut off from serving their community. Why? This was done because of the way they lived their lives, because of their beliefs. We saw the Prime Minister rise in this House and do the right thing and apologize to that group of people, the LGBTQ community.

We are seeing a government today, in 2018, do exactly the same thing to a group of Canadians. In December 2017, just a week or so before Christmas, the Liberal government announced that anybody who wanted to apply and possibly receive funding for the Canada summer jobs program would have to sign onto the government's attestation on a certain number of beliefs, and if they did not do that, they would be denied funding. That was several months ago. As soon as we saw it, and as soon as these groups saw this attestation, they were extremely concerned that their rights would be infringed on. Today, literally as we speak, we are seeing this come to fruition where amazing, excellent, and great organizations across the country are being denied funding because they have not checked off the values test box of the Prime Minister and the Liberal government.

Business of Supply

I want to talk for a minute about the Canada summer jobs program. This is a program that has been non-partisan. In fact, in 2016, over 75,000 students across Canada benefited from the work experience. This has been a wonderful program where we as members of Parliament actually have been able to look at who was getting these summer job grants. We would congratulate them and many times help them work with their application. These are groups who are not doing political work. They are advocating for people, advocating for communities, and they are employing our young people to do so. This was the exact program that the Liberals and the Liberal thought police decided they were going to attack with this attestation.

Let me read what the Charter of Rights and Freedoms actually says:

1. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Then it mentions the fundamental freedoms:

2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:
 - (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
 - (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
 - (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
 - (d) freedom of association.

For these organizations and the individuals who work for them, these are their charter rights.

We saw again a few short months ago when Omar Khadr, a convicted terrorist, somebody who fought and worked to kill our soldiers and our allied soldiers, was awarded \$10.5 million by the government and the Prime Minister. Canadians were outraged. By the way, let us not forget that his lawyer has just been appointed as a federal judge by the Liberals.

● (1035)

What was the Prime Minister's defence of this \$10.5 million payout to this convicted terrorist? He said, "The Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects all Canadians, every one of us, even when it is uncomfortable." I would add, ten-and-a-half million dollars uncomfortable. These are the Prime Minister's words, "This is not about the details or merits of the Khadr case. When the government violates any Canadian's charter rights, we all end up paying for it."

The Prime Minister has no problem violating the rights of tens of thousands, if not millions, of Canadians across the country who do not agree with him. He has no problem violating their rights by taking away their ability to apply and to receive Canada summer jobs funding. By the way, it is not his money; it is taxpayers' dollars. Let us remember that. He has his family fortune and he seems to love using taxpayers' dollars for all of his holidays, his nannies, and all of the stuff he wastes money on. This summer jobs program money is not his money. It belongs to the people, but he has no problem violating their rights.

The Prime Minister even went on to say, "The anger that some people feel, and that a lot of people feel about the payment the government made to Omar Khadr is real and quite frankly—this might surprise you—but I share that anger and frustration. That settlement had nothing to do with what Omar Khadr might have or

might not have done. It had to do with what the Canadian government did or did not do and when a Canadian government wilfully turns its back on defending a Canadian's rights and allows a Canadian to be tortured and mistreated, we all end up paying."

We paid Omar Khadr \$10.5 million because apparently his rights were violated. We have apologized, and rightly so, to a group of people who in the 1960s to 1990s had their rights violated, and at the same time the Liberal government is violating the rights of Canadians who will not sign this attestation.

I want to mention some real stories with some real names of people whose rights are being violated right now.

David Acco is an indigenous business leader in Quebec. His company provides technology integration and human resources counselling. This is what he had to say about the Liberals' values attestation requirement, "As an Indigenous person, what I care about is indigenous youth getting into STEM, science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and into management positions, but the message I'm getting on the summer jobs program is what matters to them are my religious beliefs. It's reminiscent of the days when the churches told us what to do to civilize our brains."

This individual wants to hire a student and make sure that young people are exposed to the STEM fields in industry and he is being told he cannot apply because what he believes privately might disagree with what the Prime Minister thinks.

Dr. Efreem Leakemariam, the pastor from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church in Toronto had this to say about the Canada summer jobs attestation requirement, "I remember why I came to Canada 29 years ago. I came because we had a Communist discriminatory government in our country. As a young man at age 17, I was discriminated for my beliefs. I was tortured. That's why I escaped and I came here to a land of freedom, the land of respect, and I am very proud to be Canadian today. But the reason that we are here is because of this summer jobs for young people. I believe summer jobs should be based on skills and talents, not based on someone's views, whether religious or ideological views. We oppose that kind of ideology."

I am so fortunate. I have never been tortured for my beliefs. I have always lived in Canada, where I cannot impose my beliefs on somebody else. I cannot stop somebody else from having their rights but I am allowed to have my beliefs. Canadians are allowed to have their individual beliefs.

Conservatives will always stand up for the beliefs of Canadians and their rights. Let us not have to be apologizing for something else in 50 years. In 50 years, let us not have the government have to stand up and apologize for trampling all over the rights of those Canadians who applied for the summer jobs program in 2018. Let us change this. Let us do the right thing.

● (1040)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the opposition House leader's speech, and there is something we completely disagree on. This is not about beliefs. This is about activities.

Business of Supply

Again, I refer to the supplementary information, which is on the government website, which clarifies what the attestation says. I am going to read portions of it:

Core mandate: This is the primary activities undertaken by the organization that reflect the organization's ongoing services provided to the community. It is not the beliefs of the organization, and it is not the values of the organization.

In example 2, it refers to a faith-based organization with anti-abortion beliefs that applies for funding to hire students to serve meals to the homeless. Does it qualify? Yes, it does.

I would ask the opposition House leader to acknowledge that this is about activities. It is clear on the website. The attestation can be signed, referencing the supplementary information. Does she not recognize that this is about activities and it is not about beliefs?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, that is absolute hogwash. I would like to use a stronger term, but I will not.

I can just hear the government back in 1950 telling the LGBTQ community that it is not about this or that. The government had to apologize because it infringed on Canadians' rights.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, order. I just want to remind members that they had an opportunity to ask questions. They were afforded respect, and I expect them to also afford that respect to the person who has the floor.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, the Mustard Seed in Calgary Centre provides social services for the homeless. Stephen Wile, the CEO, said that because of this attestation, up to 300 youth in Calgary will not get to experience what it is like to work with the homeless and foster a compassionate heart.

Either the attestation is meaningless, and if it is, then the government should just remove it, or it is a values test. If the government is worried that the Mustard Seed is going to be doing some terrible advocacy work for some group that does not fit in with the Liberal thought police, it could just say that the Mustard Seed is doing advocacy work. It is pretty clear the work that it does.

Lindsey Villages in Ajax—

●(1045)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Sorry, but we have to allow for more questions. Maybe the member could put that into her response.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree that the Liberals' criteria were confusing from the outset. It was so confusing that we received many phone calls and emails in our ridings from religious groups and others asking what was going on. We had to clarify and explain the situation. It raised some controversy.

I would like to know whether my colleague agrees that we should act in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and comply with it. The question of women's rights is not up for debate. The Supreme Court has ruled that restricting access to abortion is unconstitutional. I would like to know whether my colleague agrees that we must uphold the charter, women's rights, and the Supreme Court ruling.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, this is about organizations that are doing great work for Canadians across the country. It is about their beliefs being questioned.

Even if I might disagree with them, this is not about what I personally believe. This is about the personal beliefs of organizations across the country that have a right to their beliefs. They have a right to do great work for people who have nothing to do with some of these very divisive and contentious issues.

In Canada, we get to disagree. I am going to give an example. I come from an area where there is a very strong Mennonite community. Consumption of alcohol is frowned upon. In some places, it is actually taught that it is wrong and people should not drink. That group has a right to believe that. They do not have a right to stop somebody else from consuming alcohol, because alcohol consumption is legal in Canada.

I use that as an example of what we are talking about. It is not about the specific issue. It is about the freedom of individuals and groups to disagree with the government and still be able to do good work on other issues and employ young people. That is what this is about.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as parliamentary secretary, I am very pleased to stand today and join in this debate.

I want to recognize my colleague from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas for, even in her question, providing that clarification had been circulated. The NDP has identified that as well. The clarifications were provided quite some time ago to all members of Parliament and community groups.

My friend and colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London, a member whom I like a great deal, referred to the attestation as “BS”. If the “BS” stands for a “brave stand”, then I agree with her. This is all about a government that is standing up for the rights of Canadians, rights that were fought for by women, immigrants, and the LGBTQ2 community. These rights have long been fought for, and there is an expectation of the government of the day to stand by those citizens and defend those rights, which is exactly what we are doing through this initiative. Therefore, I am very happy to stand and speak to the motion today.

It is not news to any Canadian that prosperity depends more and more on a solid start for the next generation of workers. It also depends on the work experience they can gain to succeed in their careers to continue to boost our national economy and help our middle class prosper.

Business of Supply

A summer job is an important opportunity for young people to get that kind of valuable work experience for which employers are looking. We hear time and time again that, “Yes, we’d like to give you the opportunity, but you have no experience”. Well, it is tough to get that experience if young people are not presented with that opportunity. This type of job also enables students to earn some money to help offset the cost of the school year ahead.

This is why our government is taking action right away. As a result of our government’s increased investments in 2017, the number of jobs offered to young Canadians through the Canada summer jobs program nearly doubled compared to 2015 with the outgoing Conservative government.

The Canada summer jobs program is about creating quality work experience for young Canadians right across the country. When we learned that funding through the Canada summer jobs program had been used to undermine the rights of some Canadians, we took the necessary steps to ensure those rights were respected.

In the past, funding was used to support organizations like the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, which put kids to work distributing graphic images of aborted fetuses, and other organizations that did not welcome youth from the LGBTQ2 community in their summer camps. We know the Conservative Party has a different opinion on some of these issues.

On April 26, 2017, weeks before the Conservative leadership vote, Jonathon Van Maren, the communications director for the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, wrote in a blog post endorsing the current leader of the opposition as one of the top three choices in the leadership race. He reached out to the leader and gave him a statement in which he affirmed that the leader of the opposition had always voted in favour of anti-choice legislation.

The leader of the opposition is against our \$650 million investment in maternal health so women around the world can have safe access to the abortion health services they require. The leader of the opposition affirmed that he voted against transgender rights in Bill C-16. He believes that Jordan Peterson is correct on his views of gender pronouns. We know the leader is against LGBTQ2 rights. He is against women’s right to choose and against transgender rights, as his own words have confirmed.

The Government of Canada is committed to respecting the fundamental rights of all Canadians, including the LGBTQ2 and women’s rights. We also support the freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There is nothing controversial about that.

• (1050)

We have taken concrete steps to prevent federal funding from going to create jobs that do not respect the rights of all Canadians.

As a result, the Canadian summer jobs 2018 application form asks organizations to confirm that both their core mandate and the jobs in question respect individual human rights and labour laws and do not support discriminatory practices. It is a question of justice and equality for everyone, not a question of beliefs. It is another example of the traditional Canadian approach of diversity and inclusion.

The opposition keeps talking about critics, but let me take a different view.

We want to talk about the many supporters of the attestation. Major Canadian organizations are supporting our approach. In fact, our government received an open letter from the National Association of Women and the Law saying how supportive it was of this year’s eligibility requirements for CSJ applicants. A number of my colleagues in the House today know that the women in law group testified yesterday at committee on Bill C-65. They know that it is a highly regarded organization nationally, if not universally.

The association wrote, in black and white:

Significant misinformation has been widely circulated in the media about the nature of the attestation that is now required by organizations that wish to apply for federal government grants for student jobs through the CSJ program. We are confident that the safeguards introduced to the CSJ program are not discriminatory, and do not represent any infringement on freedom of religion, conscience, or any other rights that people in Canada enjoy.

This comes from an organization that promotes the equality rights of women in our country. This organization has played a major role in major milestones toward women’s equality in Canada, such as the inclusions of sections 15 and 28 in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; amendments to sexual assault laws, positive changes to family law and to the divorce act; rape shield legislation; and criminal harassment legislation.

There is more.

An open letter of support was signed by 80 major organizations from across Canada. Let me name a few. There is Oxfam Canada, YMCA Canada, The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, Women’s Human Rights Education Institute, Abortion Support Services Atlantic, Alberta Pro-Choice Coalition, the Network of Black Business & Professional Women, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Canadian Health Coalition. The list of supporting organizations goes on and on. Strong voices across the country are raising in support of this year’s eligibility requirements for CSJ applicants. Who is in a better position than these organizations to speak out on the issue that concerns us today?

This display of support is just one example. There are many more supporters of the attestation that is required by CSJ applicants.

However, people may ask what the Canada summer jobs program consists of. It is a federal program that aims to provide salary subsidies to employers so they can create jobs for high school and post-secondary students. It provides financial aid to the not-for-profit organizations, public sector employers, and small businesses with up to 50 employees. This funding enables the creation of summer job opportunities for youth between the ages of 15 and 30, who are studying full time and are planning to go back to school for the following year. As was the case in years past, religious and faith-based organizations are eligible for funding through the program and are invited to apply.

Business of Supply

•(1055)

To better meet the changing needs of the new increasingly globalized economy, our youth employment strategy helps young Canadians receive valuable work experience and skills development in support of their future career. It includes three program streams.

First, the skills stream helps youth facing barriers to employment develop the skills they need to find a job or go back to school. The focus is on single parents and newcomers, as well as youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, and youth in rural and remote areas.

The second stream, career focus, helps post-secondary graduates find a job through paid internships. It provides these youth with the information and experience they need to make an informed decision about their career, find a job, or pursue graduate studies.

Finally, the summer work experience stream offers subsidies to employers for them to create summer jobs for high school and post-secondary students and includes the Canada summer jobs program. Each year we invest over \$330 million in this strategy and we have committed to investing an additional \$340 million over three years to create up to 35,000 additional summer jobs for youth.

In fact, I would be remiss if I did not mention that in budget 2018, our government proposes to provide an additional \$450 million over five years, starting in 2018-19, for the youth employment strategy. This funding will support the continued growth of the number of job placements funded under Canada summer jobs in 2019-20. It will also provide additional resources for a modernized youth employment strategy in the following years, building on the input of the expert panel on youth employment. As well, a renewed youth employment strategy will be announced over the course of the next year.

All this to say, we are doing this for Canadian youth.

Let us go back to the issue today.

Under Canada summer jobs, employers are invited to submit an application that meets the program's national priorities, which were established to better meet the current and future needs of the labour market and improve the situation of youth in the labour market. This means that we prioritize jobs created by employers that intend to hire youth from under-represented groups, including new immigrants or refugees, indigenous people, people with disabilities, and visible minorities.

The program will also favour small job creating businesses, organizations that support employment opportunities for official language minority communities, and organizations that offer services or support to the LGBTQ2 community.

Canada summer jobs will also place a particular focus on organizations that support job opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematic sectors, as well as the information and communications technology sectors, particular for women.

For this reason, the CSJ program will not provide funding to organizations whose main activities include partisan political activities or seek to remove or undermine established individual rights for Canadians. To clarify, our government has taken the principled stand that we will not fund groups that distribute graphic

pictures of bloody fetuses to school-age children. Any organization whose activities aim to limit women's existing reproductive rights will not be eligible for this funding. The same goes for a summer camp that would submit an application to hire students as camp counsellors at a camp that would not welcome youth from the LGBTQ2 community.

On the other hand, many other faith-based organizations would be eligible for the program. Say, for example, a faith-based organization with anti-abortion beliefs applies for funding to hire students to serve meals to the homeless. The organization provides numerous programs in support of its community. The students would be responsible for meal planning, buying groceries, serving meals, etc. This organization would be eligible to apply.

Say another faith-based organization that embraces the traditional definition of marriage but whose primary activities reduce social isolation among seniors applies for funding to hire students. The students would be responsible for developing and delivering programs for all seniors, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. This organization would be eligible to apply.

•(1100)

Another example would be an organization with anti-abortion beliefs that runs a summer camp for underprivileged youth. It would be eligible to submit an application. This would enable it to offer students summer jobs as camp counsellors.

Applicants have to confirm that they meet the new requirement through an attestation included in the application form. They are not required to share their points of view, their beliefs, or their values, because these are not taken into consideration in the program application process. That an organization is affiliated with a religion does not make it ineligible. Service Canada evaluates the applications based on the eligibility and assessment criteria, including national and local priorities. All the eligible applications in a constituency are ranked accordingly.

Each year, members of Parliament are invited to take part in certain activities related to the Canada summer jobs program. This means that elected officials can help promote the program, establish local priorities, confirm the list of projects, inform the selected employers, and take part in announcements related to those programs. Members of Parliament are invited to take part in these aspects of the CSJ program, but their participation is, of course, voluntary.

In cases where members of Parliament do not take part in the process, Service Canada establishes the list of projects for their constituencies. Summer job priorities will not be the same in Nunavut as they are in Toronto or Calgary or Vancouver or Cape Breton—Canso. They will not be the same in Prince Edward Island as they are in Saskatchewan.

Business of Supply

The Canada summer jobs program is not a government program just like any other. It meets the needs of a young, dynamic workforce while at the same time meeting the current needs of each region across this country during the summer period. Above all, it meets young people's need to get rewarding summer work that will help them gain much-needed experience to start their professional lives.

Our government is committed to ensuring that government funding respects Canadians' hard-won rights, particularly those of women and the LGBTQ2 community. We have taken the principled stand that we will not fund groups that distribute graphic pictures of bloody fetuses to school-age children or any groups whose jobs will limit the protections Canadians depend on.

We know that religious- and faith-based organizations, which are primarily focused on compassion and helping those in our society who are most in need, offer valuable services to our communities. The changes we have made to the CSJ program will ensure that youth who get jobs funded by the government will be working in an environment that respects the rights of all Canadians.

• (1105)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member expressed himself very clearly.

This individual is a pastor of a church that received Canada summer jobs funding in the past. It does amazing camp work. These individuals also serve in our community, which needs additional help through the summer with so many events. He said, "We have received a notification that our application must be resubmitted because 'the attestation cannot be altered or modified. The 'I attest' box must be checked and the application signed.' However, as explained to you in our application, the requirement of the government to force us to make the attestation is very discriminatory. In fact, we believe it to be a violation of our constitutional rights.

"Compelled speech violates the long-held democratic rights that have existed in Canada before the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and have been reiterated in the charter and are recognized in the Canadian Human Rights Act. Our religious beliefs and obligations, our conscience, our beliefs, thoughts, and opinions all preclude us from making the attestation as set out in the application and guide, including the supplementary information. Where [a member across the floor] indicated that they could just reference it, you're not allowed to reference anything. You must only sign the box. That is the reason we include a note regarding the attestation in our original application."

The member opposite said that there are all kinds of organizations that qualify for this that have certain perspectives but are not using those perspectives. They cannot sign the attestation. Can the member not admit that those organizations do not qualify under this Canada summer jobs program?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member sharing the correspondence she received from a constituent. However, I am sure she would have taken the time to contact that constituent, as many of us have done, to clarify. We have made those individual phone calls to clarify that the core mandate is specifically about the program being offered by that host community, as is clearly identified in the clarification. I have a number of faith-based communities that have all reapplied. They received those types of

grants in the past and have delivered tremendous programs to our community. Once the clarification was made, they were very comfortable with it.

It is part of our responsibility as elected officials, as members of Parliament, to serve our constituents. I think the clarification would certainly have gone a long way in easing the concerns of that applicant. However, in no way should that have an impact if the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to allow for other questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, of course we will be voting against this motion because the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a foundational statute that has defined us for more than 35 years now.

As my colleague explained so well in his speech and in his responses, the problem is that this criterion was confusing from the start. Some organizations felt that they were being excluded when they were not. The hon. member said it clearly in his speech: ever since establishing this criterion and requiring this attestation, the government has been spending its time clarifying and explaining to groups that they are not being excluded. That is the problem.

Does my colleague think that maybe that is why we are here today debating this motion, because the criterion was confusing from the start?

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Speaker, had it been December when we were having this debate, I might have agreed with the member that the wording on the particular issue was murky. That is why a clarification was issued. It has been well received. If the subscription rate under this program is any indication, we are above the number of applications we had last year for this program.

The member does not have to take my word for it. If she did not have an opportunity to listen to my speech, I will read this into the record once again for her benefit. It is from the National Association of Women and the Law, which states:

Significant misinformation has been widely circulated in the media about the nature of the attestation that is now required by organizations.... We are absolutely confident that the safeguards introduced to the CSJ program are not discriminatory, and do not represent any infringement on freedom of religion, conscience, or any other rights that people in Canada enjoy.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was elected in 2004. This will be the 14th year I have signed off on the Canada summer jobs program. This is the first time a new core values test is being presented to the community of Langley—Aldergrove, which I represent. My community is outraged. There are students who are not going to get summer jobs because the Liberals are asking my constituents to bow the knee to them. They must agree with their core values or they are going to be disqualified. It is disgraceful. It is unconstitutional. What is happening is terrible.

Business of Supply

I will provide an example. There is a woodworking shop that wants to help women who are recovering from addiction. It is not going to be able to provide these jobs and training to these young women students, because they will not bow the knee to the Liberal ideology. That is wrong.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Speaker, my colleague and I go way back. We have been in the House for quite some time. The benefit of that is that he would have the memory of when he sat on this side of the House and I sat pretty much in that same seat in opposition. The prime minister of the day, Stephen Harper, wanted to cut the Canada jobs program completely and cut 35,000 places. Mike Savage, the current mayor of Halifax, Maria Minna, and I fought like crazy to make sure that it did not happen. Monte Solberg sat right here, and the former prime minister went up and said, “Whatever you guys are doing with the Canada summer jobs, stop it”, so they returned to the program. The member sat on the bench when his government was going to shut the whole program down completely.

Members should know this. This attestation is about protecting the rights of Canadians that have been hard fought for. Canadians expect their government to defend them, and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for enlightening the House on what this program is and is not. I also thank the opposition for giving us a day to clarify human rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and how they fit into this discussion and to talk about the increases our government is making in this program to help youth in our communities get their first jobs.

Could the parliamentary secretary comment on what this is and what this is not in terms of the choices Canadians now have and respect for other people's opinions in this discussion?

• (1115)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Madam Speaker, going back to the clarification, the program had been abused in the past, and they felt that it was imperative that this summer money, this support and grant money, not be used in any way that would attack the rights of Canadians who had long fought for those particular rights. This is a clarification to make sure that the groups accessing these very important funds providing very important opportunities for young Canadians have them go toward the types of activities Canadians have come to expect, not ones that are politically motivated or are trying to limit the rights of Canadians. That is why we support this particular attestation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Salaberry—Suroît. I rise today to speak against the Conservative motion. The NDP believes, as does the government, that it is unacceptable to provide public money to groups whose work focuses on undermining women's rights, access to abortion, or the rights of the LGBTQ community. The new attestation for the Canada summer jobs program requires groups to state that they respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is a foundational document that has governed us for more than 35 years.

For our party, the issue of women's rights is not up for debate. The Supreme Court has already ruled on the fact that restricting access to abortion is unconstitutional. However, the government must clarify its position for the various groups. The wording is so vague that organizations in my riding and all other ridings believe that they are excluded from the program when that is not the case. We are here today debating the wording because, from the very beginning, the government should simply have made it clear that the new attestation refers to activities that fail to comply with the charter and not to a group's beliefs or lack of a position. It is really quite simple. This is not about saying that a group is or is not doing good work, but rather ensuring that the nature of the jobs to be done by youth under the Canada summer jobs program does not contravene the charter and our laws.

I want to be clear. We recognize that many organizations, including religious groups, are doing a lot of incredible work to support people in need, and even if they do not support abortion, the nature of their work does not violate the values of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is why we believe that these groups and organizations should have the right to apply for the Canada summer jobs program. It is up to the government to clarify with these groups.

Admittedly, the wording in the Canada summer jobs application is quite vague. The government must clarify the wording. It should have done so before launching the program and putting this in the criteria. I do, however, appreciate the work already being done to clarify the selection criteria to ensure that any jobs submitted do not violate the charter.

The NDP believes that we must properly ensure, before groups even receiving funding, that the jobs being offered to young people under the Canada summer jobs program are not in sectors that contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our laws. This is non-negotiable for us. This is not a partisan measure or issue. This is not about forcing opinions or ideologies on these organizations. We are simply talking about upholding the rights and values of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Canada summer jobs is a very important initiative in my riding. Last summer, 60 organizations and SMEs in my riding were able to benefit from this funding, which supports non-profit organizations, public sector employers, and SMEs that create useful and instructive summer jobs for students. A total of 168 young people were able to gain valuable experience last summer in my riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot under the Canada summer jobs program.

I worked in community organizations for nearly 30 years before becoming an MP. I worked in a shelter for battered women and their children. I worked in a mental health crisis centre, and I worked for an organization that helps people with intellectual disabilities. I spent the majority of my career, over 10 years, as the director of a community organization for troubled youth, the Auberge du coeur Le Baluchon. I am very proud of that.

Business of Supply

●(1120)

All of these organizations hired at least two students every summer, helping those students gain work experience as part of their studies. In our case, they were working for organizations that helped people in need, whether it was battered women, people in crisis, or young people with intellectual disabilities.

I was hired one summer under what was known as the summer career placement program. I helped young people with intellectual disabilities with various activities. That was a wonderful summer. I always say that people with intellectual disabilities remind us of what is most important in life, and that is the people we love and who love us. That is all that is important for them. That was a great summer. I really learned a lot.

The Auberge du coeur Le Baluchon hired students, especially female students, for service jobs in areas like psychoeducation and correctional intervention techniques. The Canada summer jobs program gave these students a chance to gain experience in a summer job, working under the supervision of other staff. It gave them an opportunity to acquire work experience that was relevant to their studies and to be paid for it. We know that many internships are unpaid. Our organization did not offer pay either, but under this program, the students are often paid. These students at least had a summer job where they could gain experience and spend time with troubled youth, which is something that I also found very instructive. Working in this environment is an experience for them too. I always tell my colleagues in the House that the more closed-off a youth is to what I am trying to say, the more hurt he or she must be. It is important to bear that in mind and try to pierce that armour. I always say that the toughest nuts to crack are the softest on the inside. It is important to offer these experiences.

What is disappointing about the government's vague criteria is that they are casting a shadow over a very useful program that is highly valued in all of our ridings. It is unfortunate that we have to talk about this program today and reiterate that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is important and that the rights of women and LGBTQ communities are non-negotiable. It is a shame, because we will soon be receiving a list of organizations and student jobs in our respective ridings that we will have to approve. That is always interesting.

I always ask organizations to send me a copy of their projects, because I like to see details and explanations on what the students will be doing. I am fascinated by all the work that is being done to help youth in my riding. There are a lot of recreational organizations, for example. That is important. Working as a day camp counsellor is a very enriching experience. I represent 25 municipalities, and interesting things are happening in each and every one of them.

In short, this program gives young people a chance to gain valuable experience that will be useful in their future careers, and sometimes even leads to their first job. I am truly proud of this initiative. Year after year, it is a huge success. It is also vital to our region's economy, because last year, it brought nearly half a million dollars into my riding. It goes without saying, but it is also incredibly rewarding for young people. In a riding like mine, where labour is always needed, this program is more than welcome.

This year, I will be inviting youth who have benefited from the Canada summer jobs program to join me for an evening meeting to discuss their experiences and motivations. This meeting promises to be absolutely fascinating, and all youth who have participated in the Canada summer jobs program are invited.

Again, I want to say that the NDP agrees with the government that it is fundamentally unacceptable to use taxpayer dollars to fund groups whose work focuses on restricting women's rights and access to abortion.

●(1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member across the way for her speech and also for her advocacy on behalf of women in Canada and the choices that women have, which are their choices to make under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Would the member expand on that for the House?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Madam Speaker, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a foundational text that we as Canadians chose over 35 years ago.

The rights codified in the charter, such as women's rights, are non-negotiable. That is very clear, and the Supreme Court has been very clear on the subject as well. Why do we need to restate something so obvious today? Mainly because the government suddenly decided to introduce an attestation based on ill-defined criteria. I do not know exactly how this was done, but it was obviously not done well. We have had to help quite a few organizations understand what the attestation is and what it means. This whole situation could easily have been avoided, but unfortunately, here we are spending yet another day talking about how the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is actually a thing and women's rights are non-negotiable.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Ethiopian church in Don Valley East provides support for refugees that are fleeing persecution.

Pastor Dr. Efreem Leakemariam said that people in his community, who left their country fleeing persecution, were shocked that now the Canadian government wants to discriminate against them. He also said he is deeply saddened that the refugees they will bring over will continue to be marginalized, and he is afraid for his kids and what their future will be if these sorts of values tests are continued.

I wonder if the member could comment on why the government is choosing to intimidate refugees instead of showing them compassion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Madam Speaker, I admire the church for the work it does to help refugees.

Business of Supply

The riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has welcomed refugees over the past two years, too. A number of organizations, such as the food bank and the diocesan centre, support refugees. I want to make it clear that I have talked to diocesan representatives about this and explained to them that if the nature of the job is to help refugees, as in the case of the church the member mentioned, they are eligible for a subsidy to hire students to help with that work. I think it is such a shame that pastor and his organization feel excluded because the government did not clearly communicate what the attestation is all about and did not make it clear from the get-go what it means to check the box and sign the document.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak today.

This attestation has affected people across every riding in Canada. In my riding, people who have not been able to sign the attestation have called me. Some people are working with addicted young people. I had a person at a vet clinic who said that they do not agree with this, that they do not agree they are being forced to sign this, and that they will not be able to participate in the program. We have heard from municipal governments that are saying they do not agree the federal government should be dictating what they should believe.

The most interesting example of this was a call from someone who is part of an umbrella organization that helps three organizations fill out applications for the Canada summer jobs program. Last year they had 80 jobs across western Canada: the three prairie provinces, B.C., Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. They said they are unable to sign the attestation.

These are summer jobs that went into boys and girls camps, rural camps, urban camps, and aboriginal communities where young people would spend time working in these communities for the summer. Those 80 jobs are completely lost. They said that this year they would get zero jobs.

Could my colleague comment on how she sees that the Liberals are attacking Canadians' rights, when people say they cannot sign that attestation?

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Madam Speaker, of course I cannot speak for the government and say why it accepts or rejects any applications.

What I can say, however, is that we, as Canadians, were all in agreement 35 years ago that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a foundational document that we all embrace. I mentioned in my speech that I used to work with organizations that support young addicts, among others, as the member said. If the nature of the job involved working with these young addicts, the job used to be eligible. It is unfortunate that they have been excluded because of this utterly vague criterion.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, like my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, I will be opposing this Conservative motion, because, by implica-

tion, it calls into question the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to some degree.

As we have heard repeatedly in the House, we have been subject to the charter for 35 years, since 1982. There was a general consensus to welcome and respect the charter.

The Liberals' management of the Canada summer jobs program has been quite confusing, which has caused many groups, especially religious groups, to feel excluded and think they could not submit a Canada summer jobs application. This has led to some unfortunate outcomes. For example, some groups will not get any funding from the program because they did not know for sure whether they were eligible to submit an application.

In the wake of this controversy all our offices received many calls. I think that the Liberals are still getting calls because this is still so confusing. Religious groups, who say that their work helps the community and that young people join them in helping the least fortunate in the community, are asking whether they have the right to submit an application. We had to explain that the nature of their activities did not go against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that they could indeed submit their application.

It bears repeating that the NDP finds it unacceptable to provide funding, taxpayer money, to groups whose work is based on fighting against women's rights, against access to abortion, and against defending the rights of the LBGTQ2 community.

As we all have been saying for years, the question of women's rights is absolutely not up for debate. As I said earlier, even the Supreme Court has ruled that restricting the right to abortion is unconstitutional. Based on that, I think that clarifications were made and continue to be made.

Any organization that wants to can apply to give young people a rewarding experience to earn money for school, in what may be their first job or simply some summer work. I think we can continue to offer these jobs and that the government should provide funding, so that young people can work and apply the skills they learned in school.

In my riding of Salaberry—Suroît, 151 jobs were funded for young people last summer. The wide range of jobs were very much appreciated. The jobs included working in museum archives, being day camp counsellors, and working in youth centres. Also receiving funding were jobs at recreational organizations, such as the Régates de Valleyfield, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year.

There are so many interesting jobs for young people. However, I must say that the Liberals and the Conservatives are playing politics here. It is appalling that we have gotten to this point. The Liberals showed in their budget that they are using the Canada summer jobs program as a marketing tool. Unbelievable. For example, last year, after I told organizations that they were approved for jobs, I was told that I would have to reduce the number of weeks each young person could work so that more young people could have jobs.

Business of Supply

•(1135)

I was told to give only six weeks of employment to some young people in order to have more jobs for more youth. That made no sense. A six-week summer job does not cover a lot of post-secondary expenses. What will young people do for the rest of the summer? What about the organizations that hire a young person for just six weeks? What will they do for the remaining eight weeks of the summer? They will have to close their doors or cut their services. That is not what they want. Young people need to work for 14 or 16 weeks or they will not have enough money to pay for their rent, food, and what they need for school. Once again, the Liberals are all talk, and they are going to say that they have an excellent record and that they created thousands of summer jobs. In reality, it is a blow to young people if they are unable find jobs that pay enough or last long enough to allow them to fully dedicate themselves to their studies the rest of the year.

The budget talks about Canada summer jobs, but there was nothing about the rest of the youth employment strategy. I wish the Conservatives had mentioned that in their opposition motion today. Will cuts be made to the skills link program? One has to wonder. Will cuts be made to the career focus program? Is there any money for those programs in the budget? No money was announced for those programs in the budget on Tuesday. The Liberals favour the Canada summer jobs program because MPs are the ones who do the work of deciding who gets the jobs, so the Liberals do not have to do it. They do not have to do all the work of administering the program because members of the House are doing it.

There is nothing in the budget about precarious employment. A report was tabled on that subject, but there is very little about it the budget the finance minister announced on Tuesday.

We would also have preferred to talk about all of the budget's shortcomings. I will mention a few others. The Liberals talk about doubling the budget as though \$400 million was never allocated in the past, but the Conservatives allocated that same amount for this program in 2010-11, when they were responsible for the budget.

The budget does nothing to make the funding for the Canada summer jobs, career focus, or skills link programs permanent, even though they are used by thousands of Canadians. For example, an organization in my riding, Une affaire de famille, received a significant amount of funding, about \$150,000, in 2017 to give young people facing barriers to employment access to services that would help them to return to the labour market. This program helped 31 young people. The organization wanted to continue with this project, but it recently received a letter from the government saying that it was unable to renew the project because of budgetary constraints.

What will happen to young people in extremely disadvantaged regions, such as Salaberry—Suroît or the Upper St. Lawrence? These young people are struggling. They may have addictions, they may have dropped out of school, or they may have mental health problems. Organizations such as the one I mentioned are trying to help them to get jobs, give them valuable and relevant tools, build their self-confidence, and direct and guide them. However, now the government is taking all that money away from these organizations, leaving them with no alternative. It does not make any sense.

Last year, in addition to failing to renew this program, the Liberals added Young Canada Works to the youth employment strategy, even though that program falls under the jurisdiction of another department, Canadian Heritage. This year, there has been no mention of the program, not even under official languages. However, many francophone organizations use the Young Canada Works program because it is the only one that has a language criterion and that enables young Acadians, Franco-Saskatchewanians, and Franco-Yukoners to more easily access jobs where they can work in their mother tongue.

There is also the problem of Phoenix. We should also be talking about that since we know that over 200,000 public servants are affected. Generally speaking, people who work irregular schedules are having the most problems, for example, those doing paid internships, those on parental leave, and summer students. They are the ones who are suffering the most. They do not have access to the parliamentary network.

•(1140)

We should have been talking about these types of projects that affect whether young people can or cannot get good and lasting jobs that will help improve their lives. That was not addressed in the budget.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know the member was here in the last Parliament, so she would see the impact of the additional funding in the program. Since we came to government, we have doubled the number of students who receive support. There were \$330 million in the program, and we have infused another \$350 million in that program. I am sure the member has seen it in her riding.

The member ran on a platform that included an investment of \$25 million between 2017 and 2019. Does she see that investment we have made has a greater impact than the \$25 million the NDP had promised?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, it makes me laugh to see how partisan the Liberals can be.

Yes, they doubled the amount and that is significant. However, as I said in my speech, they are asking us to give fewer weeks to every young person who gets a job. It is absurd. They are positioning themselves to boost their numbers so that they can brag at the expense of our young people, who will get jobs for shorter periods of time and will not gain as many skills as they would in 12, 14, or 16 weeks.

Let us not forget that it is an investment for three months during the summer. What is the government doing for young people who are graduating from university and college and who need a full-time job for the entire year? Automation is causing problems. Over the next 20 years, 40% of jobs will be automated. That will create job insecurity for young people. What are the Liberals doing about that? I would remind hon. members that the Minister of Finance said that we have to get used to it. What a fine response for helping our young people.

Business of Supply

•(1145)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for the clarity of her comments on the federal program, which spreads the money it provides so thinly that it puts our young people in a precarious situation.

My question for my colleague concerns the motion before us. I would basically like to know whether we live in a state where there is a separation between rights and the government.

Does she not find that the government is imposing its ideology on people whose beliefs differ from those of the Liberals? Is the Liberal government going down a slippery slope by imposing its ideology on all Canadians when freedom of conscience is a fundamental principle of Canadian society?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, I would say that the Liberals were very vague with respect to the criteria for applying to the Canada summer jobs program.

Consequently, many organizations believed that they would be excluded, which was not and should not be the case. All we want is for those organizations that apply to comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and, above all, to respect women's rights. I believe that everyone agrees with that, and I hope that my Conservative colleague agrees that women's rights should be respected in all the activities conducted by every organization that receives public money through the Canada summer jobs program.

That said, I think that the Conservatives could have used their opposition day to talk about the programs and services not currently available to young people. I met with representatives from Generation Squeeze Canada yesterday. According to this organization, young people aged 25 to 34 in 2018 earn on average \$6,000 less than their counterparts did in 1976, 40 years ago. I think there is a problem. The government claims to want to give young people the tools and opportunities they need to thrive, but this is not what is being done in 2018, with a budget that barely addresses job insecurity and does nothing to ensure that young people are not graduating with \$25,000 to \$30,000 in debt because they pay interest. The government is making money from these students.

[*English*]

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know the people from our region appreciate the opportunity for their member of Parliament to stand today. I would like to start by saying it is an honour to split my time with the other member for Barrie—Innisfil, some would say the better member for Barrie, or at least better looking.

Oftentimes when we get the opportunity to speak in the House of Commons, it is on motions and items where we see very positive changes happening. Unfortunately, today is not one of those moments. I think I can speak for every member in the House when I say that every summer I look forward to seeing the different organizations applying for Canada summer jobs money. They are applying to put students into the workplace to give them experience and ensure they are ready either for the studies they are going back to or eventually the job market.

Unfortunately, this year we have had a change introduced by the Liberal government. The Prime Minister and his team have decided that in order to qualify for funding, organizations would need to sign a new attestation. Focusing on the meat of the attestation, it states:

Both the job* and my organization's core mandate* respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as other rights. These include reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability or sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression;....

When we look at this on the surface, it is something perhaps many people would immediately jump behind. When we look deeper into this and the effect the attestation and verbiage put forward by the government is having on society, we can see major issues. We have seen organizations across the country come forward and state that they have issues getting these summer students, who will be providing services to Canadians, to sign the attestation. They cannot, in fact, sign this attestation based on the one of the items outlined in the attestation, either freedom of religion or freedom of speech.

The Toronto City Mission, in the riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, helps literally thousands of people. It helps widows, kids in government housing, those who do not have a place to live, the homeless, those with disabilities and mental health issues, those who are seeking employment, food, and shelter. Dave Addison, of the Toronto City Mission, says the following about the attestation:

The mission is already operating at a deficit, having decided last year to offer the camps [for children] for free because many of the families they serve can't afford to pay any fee [at all]....

We love the widow, the orphan, the refugee, [and] the poor. We ask the government to remove the attestation and allow us to do our loving work.

That is the crux of the issue we have in front of us today. There are thousands upon thousands of organizations across this country that just want to love and help Canadians who are in need. In my own riding of Barrie—Springwater—Oro—Medonte, the Hope City Church in downtown Barrie helps those who are trying to get out of prostitution rings or out of human trafficking. It offers support services to help people get their lives on track, to help those dealing with mental health issues and addictions, yet this year it will not be able to provide those services because it is unable to sign this attestation.

The government would have Canadians believe that this is somehow about some sort of side issue that it would like to bring up. The reality is that this attestation, no matter what the intent was by the government, is about the Canadians it affects. It is about the widow that the Toronto City Mission helps. It is about the children in government housing who would not have a summer camp to go to without the Toronto City Mission. This attestation and its effects, this entire debate, is about seniors who do not have access to health care, yet there are organizations in each of our communities across the country that step up and provide these services.

Business of Supply

• (1150)

This attestation and this entire issue, this debate today, are about Canadians who are marginalized who no longer will have the services that they had last year because the government decided to introduce this attestation. This entire debate is about supporting those in our community who need help, and it does not matter where in the country they come from. It does not matter whether someone is a Liberal MP in Atlantic Canada, a Conservative MP from Ontario, or a New Democrat from B.C. These issues are affecting us all the same.

We are seeing organizations in our communities pulling back from the entire process for summer students, which means they are pulling back from the services that they are providing Canadians or trying to find ways to come up with the funding. It is terrible. I never thought that I would see the day when we would have a government double the amount of funds going to this program, which is literally training young people to help those in need and actually helping those who are in need, and at the same time as doubling the funding it is cutting the services to those who need it most. It is incredibly shameful.

It is not about one religion or one faith. This is affecting everybody. We saw in the *National Post* an article where there was an imam from the Muslim community in Mississauga speaking about this issue. We saw leaders of the Sikh community stepping up on this issue. We saw members of Catholic and Christian communities stepping up, of the Coptic Christians, and of many different faiths across our society because it affects everybody equally. It affects a Muslim kid's help phone line. It affects churches who are on the streets doing mission work. It affects Project Ramadan, which provides food and support to many different communities. Just because the organization is of the Muslim faith and has a Muslim faith basis, it does not just help Muslims. It helps everybody, anybody who is in need in that community.

This attestation is getting in the way of these organizations being able to provide those front-line services that government fails to provide. It is getting in the way of people being able to access shelters. It is getting in the way of our young people being taught the lessons and being given the experience and learning the empathy to deal with those in our society who just do not have what we have, who do not have the same access to the things that we in the House have. To say that we are going to marginalize, as a House, that the government is somehow going to marginalize not just the groups that provide these services, not just the students who work with the groups that provide these services, but those people who are in need and who are accessing these services day in and day out, is incredibly disgusting to me.

How could this be where the government has ended up? Maybe it was not the intent. Maybe the intent of this action was not to have those people hurt. Maybe the intent of this action was to try to do something good, but that is not what we are seeing. At first, the minister said that this is great and not to worry. Just a few weeks later, the Liberals had to walk out and say that, actually, the wording is not what the wording means and this is actually what they mean now, but they are not going to change the wording. Then we have organizations across the country saying that they cannot apply even under this changed wording because the verbiage is still the exact same as it was before. The minister, the Prime Minister, and the

government have failed to listen and they failed to consult and they failed to learn what the issues were with this attestation that they put forward, which is infringing on the faith and religious beliefs of Canadians.

I did not come to the House and I did not run for election to cut off services to those who are most in need in our community. I can say, as somebody who has grown up in government housing, who has accessed food banks, who has dealt with many of the issues that we are seeing these organizations that are being cut off deal with, that these are life and death matters in many situations. What we need to do today, as a House, is to call on the government to back away on the attestation and stand up for Canadians who have been marginalized.

• (1155)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, over the years I have found the summer student program to be of great value to communities throughout the riding of Winnipeg North, the area I represent.

I can appreciate the Conservatives spreading information that is not fully accurate. However, part of the concern I have as a representative wanting to serve the constituents of Winnipeg North is that if there are areas of concern, such as what the member has raised, I would suggest to those groups that when they are putting in their applications, that they have no hesitation in coming in and meeting with me. I wonder if my colleague from across the way would be inclined to do the same thing for individual groups that wanted student applications.

Was the member encouraging them through the application process so that in fact some of those grants would have been issued?

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Madam Speaker, what we have here is the member saying that he is going to navigate groups through an application process with the Government of Canada. That may be what the government is doing here. It is trying to force groups and individuals to go down the road of its beliefs. It is trying to get everybody into this one group. The reality is that Canada is a diverse country with many different faiths, religions, and points of view. When I work with the organizations in my community and across this country, we ask them; we do not tell them. The government needs to step back, consult with Canadians, and consult with the organizations that are providing services to people who are going through such severe situations.

I would call on the government again to stop telling Canadians and start working with them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree that the government's criteria for the summer jobs program were vague. A number of organizations ended up feeling excluded.

Does my colleague agree that all organizations must comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which includes women's rights and LGBTQ rights, and that these rights are non-negotiable? The government should have been more clear right from the outset.

Business of Supply

Furthermore, instead of simply talking about jobs that last three months, we should also be making an effort to ensure that young people have access to stable, high-quality, full-time jobs.

• (1200)

[*English*]

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, certainly all of the issues we have been talking about surrounding this attestation are important. In my own riding, the government recommended that the Gilbert Centre, which works with individuals in the LGBTQ2 community, receive only half of the funding it had applied for. Our office ensured that all of the funding that was applied for by the Gilbert Centre was given to it.

At the same time, the work that is done by different organizations in the community to help those who are struggling to find a home, to help those who are struggling who need shelter, to help those who do not have food, and to help those who do not have access to summer camps are just as important. These are all incredibly important issues.

The reality here, and what I believe, is that we live in a country where we do not leave anybody behind. However, what this attestation is doing is that it is leaving literally tens of thousands of Canadians behind by cutting the funding to organizations that will help those who are marginalized in our communities.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief, but it is my first opportunity to get in on this debate, although I was attempting to do so before.

I find two mistakes that have been made here, and one compounds the other. The first mistake was when the summer grants program allowed students to be hired by NGOs who were specifically focused on interfering with women's legal rights to access safe and legal abortions. This is a right that I support and that the Green Party supports. The response, however, was another mistake. I think the minister overreached. This attestation box has created great concern among people in my community, for example, the Hope Bay Bible Camp on Pender Island, or the Friendship Community Church, which has two good programs, including one that does soccer camps at Tsawout First Nation.

I will be voting for the opposition motion because I believe the attestation box was a mistake, but not because for one second I will surrender on a woman's right to equal choice and equal rights.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure there was a question there, but I would like to respond to my hon. colleague. We certainly appreciate the member's support.

We will continue to ensure, as a party, that all Canadians are respected and represented. That is what we are asking the government to do here today. We are asking it to allow all of us to be a part of this incredible mosaic we call Canada.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank my friend from Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte not only for sharing his time with me today but for his passionate conviction on this issue of the attestation. It is an issue we have seen, over the course of the last couple of months, that has really galvanized Canadians.

I will start off with a question, and I am not sure I will get the answer I think I should get. If government members were asked to sign something they did not believe in to receive government funding, would they? That is precisely what they are asking Canadian organizations, Canadian faith-based organizations, Canadian community organizations that do tremendous work across this country, as my friend from Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte talked about, to do. The government is asking them to sign something they do not fundamentally agree with, and they should not have to, because we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that defends everyone's right to freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of conviction, and freedom of religion. Everyone across this country has these rights.

I am not sure how this even came up, whether it was the minister herself who imposed this, whether this was a decision of cabinet, or whether this was a decision of the Prime Minister's backroom operatives, including Gerald Butts. This sounds very similar to the type of stuff that goes on in Ontario and did go on under Gerry Butts's watch. It is mind-boggling to me that we are even at this point.

When the government introduced this in December, just before Christmas, it created a lot of angst within the communities that apply for funding under the Canada summer jobs program. There was a lot of confusion about the attestation. There was a lot of confusion about what it meant. If someone did not sign the attestation, what would that mean for Canada summer jobs funding?

That confusion led to a lot of doubt, and it caused the government to step back and try to clarify the meaning of the attestation. That created more confusion. Within this envelope I have, there are rejected applications from those organizations that refused to sign the attestation or decided that they were going to put in a supplementary attestation and not check the boxes. Their applications were rejected by Service Canada, because they did not follow the criteria the government set out for them.

What does that mean to those organizations that received Canada summer jobs funding in the past and applied that funding toward hiring students and toward helping community organizations and community groups? They are not going to get that funding, and they are not going to be able to provide valuable work experience for those young people, many of whom are in university.

What is funny about this is that the Liberal government says that it wants to help young people gain experience and gain jobs, yet it has imposed this ideological values test that has a direct impact on those young people, many, as I said, who are university, who are looking for summer employment. It is a big problem. What is the impact of those students not working within those organizations? Many of them will not be able to do things within the community that these organizations are able to do.

Business of Supply

It is not just faith-based organizations that are having a problem with this. Two weeks ago, just before the application deadline, I was on the phone with Dan Dufour. Dan owns Eggsmart, in Alcona, which is in the riding of Barrie—Innisfil. Last year he hired four Canada summer jobs students. He does not have any faith-based problems with this. He has a fundamental individual rights problem with this. Dan asked me why he should sign this attestation to qualify for a government program he received in the past. That is a fair question.

● (1205)

What is the impact for Dan and his business? He is not going to be able to hire those four students, and the service levels within his restaurant could potentially drop. I know he is already struggling because of the high tax burden and the high regulatory burden from having a business in the province of Ontario and because of the taxes federally. I told Dan to send in the application but to include a note. I am sure his application will have been rejected because of the others that have been.

This is a real problem. I know that the government is trying to twist this. I sat through most of the debate this morning and listened to the Liberals trying to twist it and say that it is not the way it is. Clearly, there was a lot of confusion when this program first came out.

This is one of the things I found out after the election in 2015, when I first started dealing with the Canada summer jobs program. We have a tremendous ability to allocate funding for the Canada summer jobs program and to put it in areas where we think it will be best utilized, not just to hire students but to support the types of community programs that exist. One of those is municipalities. Municipalities generally apply for a large amount of funding. We are hearing stories from across the country that municipalities, which in some cases hire 100 or 120 students, are not going to be applying to the summer jobs program, because they do not feel, as municipalities, that they need to subscribe to a government values test to get government funding for a summer student jobs program.

It is a very slippery slope we are heading down when the government tries to impose its own ideological purity test on these types of programs. What is next? Where does this go next? Does it go toward old age security payments for seniors? I think these are fair questions. To be eligible, am I, as an individual, going to have to sign an attestation that says that I agree with the government's ideology? If I want to apply for employment insurance, does it mean I have to sign an attestation that says I agree with the government's ideology to qualify for insurance? It should never get to that point. It should never have gotten to this point, where the government is imposing a purity test on Canadian organizations that do tremendous work across the country.

We heard in the budget this week that there will be a lot of money flying out these doors. A lot of money will be going to organizations the government will be funding. For example, the government announced \$150 million for a journalistic fund. Was it \$50 million or \$150 million? I do not have the number quite in my head. Is it going to impose the same purity test on those organizations to apply for this funding? There is \$500 million going to a China infrastructure bank. Is the government going to impose its purity test on

organizations that apply for that funding? I think not. This is a very slippery slope we are heading down.

We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that protects the right of individuals to believe and think what they want. For the government to impose this test strikes at the very core of what this place represents. This place represents generations of Canadians who have fought for us to have the right to believe in what we believe in, to think what we want to think, and to say what we want to say, within some limits. Those fights have happened, and people have died for that.

For the government to impose this on these organizations and individuals, who have a tremendous impact across the country in the work they do, which many will now not be able to do because they will not qualify because they do not want to sign the attestation, is a real shame.

● (1210)

It is not just a shame for those communities and those people it is going to help. It is a shame for our democracy that this government would impose an ideological purity test on Canadians.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to both members on this issue in the last few minutes. I recognize that there is a lot going on at the provincial political level in their region of the country, so maybe they have been a little distracted and have not been able to fully understand what we are talking about here. We are not talking about beliefs. What we are talking about is an organization's willingness to support human rights, rights that have been developed and brought forward in this place, rights that have been talked about with Canadians across the country, rights that have been tested in the Supreme Court, with precedents set.

The member talked about a person named Dan who owns a restaurant in his riding. Rather than continue to confuse Dan, why is he not working with him to make sure that Dan can continue to get support? By politicizing this issue, as the Conservatives are doing, the member is directly impacting the ability of a restaurant operator in his riding to get money from this. Why will he not support his own constituents to make sure that they can get the money they need for these important programs?

● (1215)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, how dare the hon. member accuse me of not working with my constituent. In fact, I actually called Dan, because I noticed that he had not applied at this point. I asked everyone who applied to send my office the application. The member can sit there in Kingston and the Islands and deal with his constituents, and I will deal with mine.

Business of Supply

The member talked about beliefs. I want to quote the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, who is a member of the government. When discussing the government's attestation for Canada summer jobs, the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame said, "To me, that's a lack of respect. If I was to say to someone, 'Look, don't worry about it, just tick the box or whatever' — some people have a core fundamental belief that they don't believe in this." He talked about beliefs.

He is not alone in thinking that. Will the government finally listen to the concerns of Canadians and remove this inappropriate test from the Canada summer jobs application? That is a member from the Liberal side who said that. When the hon. member speaks of beliefs, he needs to listen to his own side as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to be able to intervene on this matter again. It is an important thing that MPs work with their constituents to help them through this process. I do not think it is politicized by political parties. I will, on the appropriate occasion, take that up with Conservatives for politicizing issues if they do not need to.

This really is coming from the grassroots. There are a lot of really good projects run by local church and religious groups in my riding. Every year they have qualified for summer grant funding. Every year they have people in the community doing good work. They have never had a political objective with those summer grants programs.

There was that one bad example I mentioned earlier of the wrong group that should never have gotten funding. The ministers should use their discretion and communicate it through their departments that political groups who harass women seeking their legal right to abortion should never receive funding. They should not have needed to go to a one-size-fits-all checkbox.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would agree with me that some groups should not have received funding in the last round.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, one of the abilities we as members have is to disseminate money to certain organizations and certain groups. In that case, a lot of discretion is left to the member of Parliament. The business owner in Alcona I cited does not have any core beliefs in terms of religion or faith or anything else. He just does not believe that he is required to sign this attestation.

In dealing with constituents and walking them through this, I want to make sure as a member of Parliament that I am putting them in the best position I can, but I am not going to ask them to sign something they do not fundamentally believe they should sign. As I said at the outset, and I gave this example, I do not believe there is anyone in the government who, if I told them to sign something they do not believe in, would actually sign it for the sake of government funding. It just does not make sense.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate, I will let the members who are standing up know that I will do my best to make sure they all get a chance to participate in the questions and comments period. Resuming debate, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin I wish to

inform the House that I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton Centre.

I am pleased to provide some background and some perspective on a Government of Canada program that has brought support to, and transformed, the outlook of young people in Canada for decades. I am referring to the Canada summer jobs program.

I have had the privilege, as an MP, of meeting many employers and many students of the CSJ program over the years. I have seen just how much difference it makes in the community. Whether I was visiting students who were helping disabled people learn how to sail at Jericho Beach, the many youth camps where young people go out into the wilderness of Pacific Spirit Regional Park to learn about ecology, the legal clinics where young people who are learning to become lawyers are hired to provide free services to people who cannot afford to pay for legal services, or whether it is those young students teaching swimming lessons to the children of families in Vancouver Quadra, there have been many ways that I have seen this program benefit the community.

This is a program that also has specific objectives for meeting the current and future needs of the labour market, and for improving the situation of the youth as they prepare to enter the labour market. This is why national priorities for the Canada summer jobs program, CSJ, were established in the first place.

Here is an outline of some of those priorities that our government has established. We are giving priority to employers who hire youth from under-represented groups, including new immigrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and visible minorities. It is true that all young people face challenges, but some young people face more challenges than others. They could benefit hugely from an opportunity to have a summer job.

For example, indigenous youth are less likely to complete high school than non-indigenous youth. We all know that abandoning high school will have a significant impact on a person's future career prospects. It is important to be able to access a summer job.

Most often youth who are immigrants have no work experience in Canada, and have no network to rely on. As well, they do not necessarily have the basic skills in one of our official languages, and have challenges in getting their foreign credentials and credits recognized.

These are all key elements of a successful integration into the Canadian market and a Canada summer job. The income is important to the students, and so is the work experience, the mentoring they receive, and the chance to improve their skills in the workplace. That is why youth from under-represented groups are part of our national priorities in the context of the CSJ program.

A second priority is favouring small businesses that play such an important role in creating jobs in Canada. Having come from a small business and then a medium business background, I am very mindful of how difficult it is for small business people. Small business people, as we know, are one of the key drivers of the Canadian economy, accounting for some 97.9% of all businesses in Canada, and representing, on average, 30% of our national GDP, playing a very important role in job creation.

Business of Supply

Small businesses do not always have the ability to pay a full salary to a summer employee, to be able to expand the services, or respond to extra demand over the summer. This federal incentive of the CSJ program is the element that allows them to hire young, inexperienced staff who will benefit from the training that they receive, but also bring new ideas and experience to the workplace.

A third priority is with regard to the official language minority communities. This program also considers organizations that support employment opportunities for official language minority communities as a national priority.

● (1220)

It is no secret that minority language groups often experience challenges in maintaining the vitality of their language and culture. The CSJ program helps by promoting the delivery of bilingual service and the use of the second language in the workplace. I know the francophone communities in British Columbia and Vancouver experienced this to be a very useful support for all of the hard work they do, often on a volunteer basis, to maintain and increase the services and vibrancy of their communities.

A fourth priority of the Canada summer jobs program is organizations that offer services or support to the LGBTQ2 community. Our government recognizes that all individuals should have the right to live according to their sexual identity, and to express that identity without discrimination. Why does the CSJ program give priority to organizations that provide opportunities for young people in the LGBTQ2 community? Simply because it is the right thing to do. This community has always been discriminated against in the workplace. Even today, members of the LGBTQ2 community earn less than their peers. Therefore, having an opportunity for a summer job can help bridge that opportunity gap.

Science and technology is a key theme for our government, and for our country's future. The CSJ program will place a particular focus on organizations that support job opportunities in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics sectors, as well as the information and communications technologies sectors, particularly for women.

Already in my constituency of Vancouver Quadra, UBC has been a beneficiary of the CSJ program to increase the opportunities it can provide to students, and the work that can be done during the summer months for the very important programs, particularly research.

I am very pleased to hear that this is now an explicit priority for the program to support our vision of making Canada a global innovation centre. This complements the historic investments in research that budget 2018 has just announced, which I am thrilled by, as are so many Canadians. By helping employers create early work experiences in the areas of science and technology, our government enables students to consider careers in the high-demand well-paid occupations that are shaping the future of the country.

Women tend to be less represented in the STEM sector. Women need to have equal opportunities to participate. This year, employers in that category are actively encouraged to consider employing women, because we know that the proportion of women is too low in

science and technology. We want to think about ways that we can help reverse that trend through our government initiatives.

Service Canada will evaluate the applications based on the eligibility conditions and the local MP's priorities as well, because local MPs understand what makes sense on the ground in terms of supporting the government's larger direction, and all eligible applications are ranked by their evaluation score.

These are the key evaluation criteria for the CSJ program. They help ensure that the program brings benefits to our citizens, their families, and the students. In this spirit, the CSJ program will not fund organizations whose primary activities involve partisan political activities, or whose activities do not respect or do actively undermine established individual human rights in Canada. That is not what government money or the CSJ program should be for.

There has been some representation on behalf of some groups and persons who have been critical of our evaluation criteria. However, I want to assure members of this House, and the people following this debate, that there is ample opportunity for those who are supporting Canada's rights and values to access this program. Many organizations are clear that the safeguards introduced to the CSJ program are not discriminatory, and do not represent any infringement on the freedoms of religion or conscience, or any other rights that people enjoy.

● (1225)

I am very happy that the CSJ program will continue to bring important benefits to young Canadians and their communities for decades to come.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech sounded very practical, and yet at the same time, it was untruthful, because the comment that this is open to all organizations, which want to help that are of a religious nature, is not true. Clearly, there has not been a study on that side of the House of what faith means to the average person who has a faith.

A pastor from my hometown of Esterhazy sent this paragraph, and asked me to share it. I will read it quickly, and then ask the member to comment on it. He wrote, "We have received a notification that our application must be resubmitted because the attestation cannot be altered or modified, the 'I attest' box must be checked and the application signed. However, as was explained to you in our application, the requirement of the government to force us to make the attestation is very discriminatory. In fact, we believe it to be a violation of our constitutional rights. Compelled speech violates the long held democratic rights that have existed in Canada before the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and have been reiterated in the charter and are recognized in the Canadian Human Rights Act. Our religious beliefs and obligations, our conscience, our beliefs, thoughts, and opinions all preclude us from making the attestation as set out with the application and guide including the supplementary information. That is the reason why we include a note regarding the attestation in our original application."

Business of Supply

Clearly, there are many organizations that want to participate, that should participate, and are being held back because of this attestation.

• (1230)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, the member's question gives me an opportunity to reinforce and confirm that it is not about the beliefs of an organization. Organizations are not being asked to submit their beliefs to any test.

I have a huge respect and admiration for faith communities of all stripes, because of the kinds of services they provide to their community, and the assistance they provide in their communities. There are many faith communities that have in the past and will continue to be part of the CSJ program.

The attestation is about the job. What is the purpose of the job, and the organization's core mandate which means its activities, not its beliefs. It is not appropriate for government dollars to go to a job, or an activity, that is not consistent with Canada's value around a woman's right to choose, or around the inclusion and equal opportunity for the LGBTQ2 community.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely delicate issue, and I will say that the NDP agrees with the Liberal government that public funds should not be used to pay students whose job or mission would be to undermine constitutional rights, like women's right to control their own bodies and make their own choices. On that subject, you either are a feminist or you are not. You either respect women's rights or you do not.

However, I want to ask the parliamentary secretary whether she would agree that this news was announced in a confusing way. Many churches and faith groups in our ridings provide community services that are totally unrelated to this part of their ideology, such as running day camps for children. These people feel sort of threatened or targeted by the government's approach, even though the work that the students would be doing is really about serving the public and the community.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for his question. It is not always easy to communicate a change in an initiative or process to the entire country or population of Canada. It is very important, and it is a privilege for us, as MPs, to be able to talk to our constituents and to religious and non-religious groups to explain the goal and objectives of this program and how its regulation and the changes made by the government can better promote Canadian values. The jobs can serve the public good, as the member was saying.

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to provide our government's perspective on an issue that is at the heart of our employment objectives for our young people, which is the issue of access to good-quality jobs.

Canada summer jobs has been a very successful Government of Canada program that has offered thousands of youth job opportunities since it was first created. The program has been reaching its

objectives to give young people the opportunity to acquire work and life experience while supporting community-based initiatives. Fundamentally, this is about jobs for kids.

These are simple objectives. The spirit of the program is to open doors for young people and give them a good start to their working careers.

It has been my honour as a member of Parliament to approve this list for hundreds of young people in our community and to ensure that at every point in every year I was able to make those kinds of calls, no discrimination was taking place.

In this context, the organizations that provide quality employment to young people through the Canada summer jobs program are as varied as the economic sectors in the country. The CSJ program provides funding to not-for-profit organizations, public sector employers, and small businesses with 50 or fewer full-time employees. The range of activities is therefore almost unlimited.

There are, and have been, a number of eligibility criteria that employers must meet, but there is one key requirement that underpins eligibility, and that criterion is respect.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

This program, which has certainly already proven itself, provides subsidies to employers so that they can create valuable summer jobs for students enrolled in secondary or post-secondary studies. This can include employers in the public sector, private companies with fewer than 50 employees, and non-profit organizations. Religious and faith-based organizations are of course eligible for program funding, as in past years, and we strongly encourage them to submit an application.

However, it is important to remember that one of the fundamental principles our government believes in is upholding the rights of Canadians, especially the rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is why, after we learned that funding through this program had been used to undermine the rights of some Canadians, we took the necessary steps to ensure that it never happens again. As the government, we had a duty to consider the fact that some organizations were not allowing young people from the LGBTQ2 community to attend their summer camps or they were distributing images of aborted fetuses. That is why we had to ask organizations to clarify their mandate and their primary activities before giving them funding under the Canada summer jobs program.

[*English*]

Our government and members of the government have been clear and vocal about our basic values over the course of our two-year time in government, values like inclusion, compassion, respect, and no discrimination. We have been trying to integrate those values into our policies and programs, like our progressive trade agenda and the inclusion of human factors in environmental assessments.

Business of Supply

This year, the CSJ program includes an element whereby applicants are required to attest that both the job and the organization's core mandate respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as other rights. We know there were comments and conversations about this and that there were constructive conversations between reasonable people. The Prime Minister spoke with the cardinal of Montreal, and the cardinal encouraged all Catholic parishes to apply to the fund. That is a fantastic example of constructive dialogue between government and faith organizations.

There is an old line that my uncle would use when we would all get together at Christmastime. He would tell all sorts of hilarious jokes and wild stories. If anybody ever questioned him about the details of his jokes, he would say, "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story." I have to compliment the opposition members today for bringing me back to those Christmas dinners, because they obviously feel they have a great storyline but the truth has nothing to do with it.

The arguments of the Conservative Party have nothing whatsoever to do with the actual content of the attestation or our government's policy on the Canada summer jobs grant. The attestation makes it crystal clear that it has nothing to do with an individual's personal beliefs, but everything to do with the nature of the jobs that organization is hiring for and the nature of the organization's core mandate, the core mandate not their personal beliefs.

The motion talks about organizations whose mandate is to feed the homeless. There is nothing in the attestation talking about core mandates of feeding the homeless. I want to see an end to homelessness. I want to ensure that all homeless people are fed, and so does our government.

The motion talks about organizations that help refugees. There is nothing in the attestation about having a core mandate to help refugees.

The opposition is pulling its hair out over a problem that simply does not exist. I sympathize with pulling one's hair out because I do not have much left to pull out. However, the Conservative Party is looking for headlines. The Conservatives see an opportunity to scare Canadians into thinking the government is coming for them and their private beliefs. Nothing could be further from the truth. People are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, with the freedom to worship in our country.

Let us talk about what is in the attestation. In particular, I want to talk about a key aspect of the attestation that has not received much attention in this discussion. It is the requirement to attest that the job and the organization will respect the right to be from discrimination on the grounds protected by the Canada Human Rights Act, including sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Some 15 months ago, the House passed Bill C-16 to protect Canadians from discrimination on the basis of their gender identity or gender expression. It explicitly protects transgender and non-binary Canadians from being discriminated against in employment. Bill C-16, as members well know, is now law, and it passed the

House with the support of members from all parties, including the mover of today's motion. Perhaps those members can explain why they voted for a law that protects gender-diverse Canadians from discrimination in employment, but are now angry that the Government of Canada will not fund organizations that want to discriminate in employment against these very gender-diverse Canadians.

Individuals are entitled to their personal beliefs. However, it is a reality that there are organizations that hold LGBTQ2 people like me with contempt and believe they are entitled to discriminate against me and others because of who we love or how we express our gender. That is why governments have passed laws to protect me and members of my community from that discrimination. Yet, it seems, from the arguments I hear today, that there is a belief that these organisations are not only entitled to discriminate, but they deserve a big government effort and government financing to help them fund that effort.

Our government has taken a stand that if an organization's mandate is to turn back the clock and take away the rights and human dignity of LGBTQ2 Canadians, or women, or indigenous people, or people with disabilities or people of visible minority background, it has the right to do so but it does not have the right to expect LGBTQ2 Canadians and other taxpayers to pay it to do it.

The other piece of this discussion is with respect to abortion. Once again, individuals are entitled to have different views on this issue. For 10 years, the previous government refused to fund international organizations that performed abortion services overseas. The Conservatives had said that if an organization was involved in abortion, it did not get Government of Canada funding. I remember those days. I do not remember a single member opposite speaking out about it. The members seemed perfectly fine to deny needed medical services to women based on a viewpoint on abortion. However, our government refuses to pay organizations to hire individuals to protest outside of an abortion clinic to scare or abuse women, or pay organizations to hand out grotesque pamphlets on the streets. We have a problem with that.

Again, people are absolutely entitled to their own points of view in our country. They are entitled to hold those views and apply for or receive a summer job grant. However, if they choose to discriminate in their employment or want to hire people for no other job than to turn back the clock on women's rights, on LGBTQ2 rights, on the rights of persons with disabilities, on indigenous rights, then this government will decline their requests for such a cheque.

Who is supporting us in this matter? Abortion Support Services Atlantic, Alberta Pro-Choice Coalition, Shelter House Thunder Bay, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, as well as the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

Business of Supply

Is it too much to ask that a Government of Canada program respect the individual rights and values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? That all seems reasonable to our government as well as to major stakeholders, including the National Association of Women and the Law. I hope all members in the House will come to the same conclusion.

We are forging ahead with our goal of strengthening the middle class and creating a level playing field where everyone has the chance to succeed. That is our vision. That is our commitment.

• (1240)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one organization in my riding affected by this is the Pine Ridge Bible Camp in northern Alberta. It has said that it cannot, in clear conscience, submit to this attestation. It says that it is a violation of its freedom of association and freedom of religion covered by the charter. It is saying that its charter rights are being affected.

The member also talked about particular camps turning people away for their lifestyle, whatever that happened to be. Could he name a single camp that has applied for the summer job program where that has been the case?

• (1245)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his work in his riding.

It is time for an educational moment. Being gay, being queer, being trans is not a lifestyle. We are born this way. It is a fundamental characteristic of who we are. We do not choose to be gay, or queer, or bisexual, or transgender or two-spirited. That is a really important characteristic and a really important notification for members of the House.

People can have intersecting identities. In fact, one of the great joys of my role as special adviser to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ issues is realizing how many queer people are also people of faith.

My question back for the hon. member is this. Why is it so difficult for organizations of faith to exclude kids of faith who are also LGBTQ? We are dealing with that fundamental issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Edmonton Centre for his speech. His passion comes through in his remarks and responses to questions.

I have to say that I completely agree with him. Taxpayers' money should not be used to pay students working for organizations that oppose certain constitutional rights, such as women's right to control their own bodies and make their own choices, or that discriminate against or exclude teenagers or children who belong to the LGBTQ2 community.

However, we also have many faith groups and churches in our ridings that organize public and social activities and provide services such as day camps and community kitchens. Those groups may have felt targeted by the Liberal government's new measure and somewhat threatened by the confusion it created.

Can my colleague suggest a way to rectify the situation?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for his support and his dedication to human rights.

It is important to note that some United churches have signed the attestation knowing that the jobs they want to fill this summer in no way conflict with their faith or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some Catholic parishes are signing the attestation because they feel that the jobs they have posted in no way conflict with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some synagogues are also applying for the program.

The fact that some faith groups have already signed the attestation and do not feel threatened by our program suggests to me that everything is fine.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, I am in full support of those communities. However, we have to look at some other things.

I want to mention a letter that I received from Great Lakes International Air Show. Maybe he can tell me what this has to do with the community to which he has referred. The organization is not comfortable with signing this attestation. This is an air show. It is what brings tourism to our community. However, as a board, it is not comfortable signing this. The organization's mandate is not about that. It feels the government is stomping on its rights of beliefs. A board of 12 people cannot agree with this.

Whether some people may be pro this or pro that, it does not matter. At the end of the day, what matters is that we will lose people who will help our economy with tourism. We will stop children and students from getting these jobs and the skills development because of this attestation.

If the government had to put out supplementary information, had to backtrack, explaining its view, does the member truly think the attestation is crystal clear?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member across the way for her support on LGBTQ and human rights issues.

As it pertains to this case, I cannot comment on why the board members may or may not want to sign the attestation.

With organizations in my riding, the clear message I am dealing with is that it is not about fundamental beliefs. It is about the positions they are hiring for and whether they are going to put anybody in a conflict or discriminate against them based on their fundamental rights, their charter rights.

Business of Supply

As members of Parliament, we have the responsibility to look at the attestation, to interpret that it is about the job, about preventing kids from being discriminated against in the workplace. An organization that hires as many kids as it wants and signs the attestation as to whether it is a faith-based group or has an air show that drives a lot of tourism to the riding sounds like great organization to me.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of information, before we go to resuming debate, I note there is a lot of interest in participating in the period for questions and comments today. Members will recall from previous occasions that when a 10-minute speech has been given by one side of the House, generally speaking, we will look to give preference to members who are posing questions and comments from the other side or from the other parties.

Having said that, it does not mean that members of the same party as the member who just presented a speech will not be recognized. Certainly, we work from a position of catching the Speaker's eye, which is what members should do, to participate in the questions and comments period. We will do our very best to ensure everyone gets a chance to be included in that. Even if it is not in that round, we will eventually get the member into the debate.

●(1250)

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for your kind introduction.

I am rising in the House today to explain to those who may be listening that we want to preserve the pillars of our society. We are proud of our democracy and the rights we have acquired. We saw the example of someone from the LGBTQ community asserting their rights and convictions. That is Canada. It is an open, tolerant, and generous country when it comes to the beliefs of each and every one of us.

With this measure, the Liberal government is really imposing its rigid partisan agenda. We saw this last week; it is a partisan straitjacket. We all remember the Prime Minister's disastrous trip to India. The fact that he used taxpayers' money to pay for his vacation is dubious enough already. It is even more dubious considering that he brought along certain MPs to solicit members of a specific community rather than do real business with one of the biggest countries in the world, with which we need to build a strong trade relationship. It is worse still when he plays partisan politics and attacks the integrity of our public service by sending his representatives to defend the indefensible and cover up his blunders. We all remember the case of Jaspal Atwal, who went to India and caused quite a stir. Asking a public servant to get involved was completely unnecessary. Here is what an Indian newspaper had to say about the whole affair:

[*English*]

...a disaster that has little parallel in India's recent diplomatic history.

[*Translation*]

It was just last week that public servant Daniel Jean was thrown to the wolves. Because of partisanship, the Liberals are prepared to

compromise the necessary separation between politics and the federal public service, not to speak of creating a major embarrassment with India. I hope that, as a country, we will apologize to India, because the Prime Minister's behaviour has not made us proud. Last week we saw the firm grip of partisanship, akin to a straitjacket.

This week, we were put in a financial straitjacket. The Liberals are driving us into yet another deficit. This will be our third year posting a deficit, this time totalling \$18 billion. All this while raising taxes for eight out of 10 middle-class families. Families are paying more tax, and future Canadians will pay off our debt. This is the second straitjacket the Liberals have put us in.

The third is the subject of the motion today. It is an ideological straitjacket. Broadly speaking, it is not complicated, it means that Canadians who do not think exactly like the Prime Minister have a problem. That is what we are denouncing today.

Yesterday, this same Prime Minister and most of his MPs proudly wore pink. Why? To oppose bullying and harassment. That was right here, yesterday. Everyone was spouting rhetoric about respecting diversity and different points of view and building a diverse society. In fact, this principle is so important that it is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Unfortunately, here is an example of the government trying to impose its ideological agenda on us. It is using a program that is meant to create jobs in my riding, Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, as well as in the riding of the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga, with whom I will be sharing my time. This is a member who has done excellent work and for whom I have great respect. I am convinced that he will do an impeccable job of addressing a point he deems important.

In this country, and in our political party, we respect every individual's freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. Unfortunately, the Liberals believe in the Liberal doctrine. It is the Prime Minister's way or the highway.

In this case, he is excluding organizations that do not endorse the Liberal ideology. Obviously, as I mentioned, this is an approach that runs counter to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because we must protect freedom of conscience.

●(1255)

In the case of the Canada summer jobs program, we should be thinking about creating jobs. The aim of the program is to create jobs for Canadian youth. That is not what the government is doing. The Prime Minister says that he is going to create jobs, but only if people think exactly like he does. People have to endorse his beliefs and values, despite the fact that freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, and freedom of religious belief are enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Business of Supply

His Majesty the Prime Minister has decided that he holds the absolute truth. If you do not think like he does, you are not entitled to government money. Where is this going to end? Unfortunately, the government has a tendency to impose its partisan agenda on federal public servants. It is driving us into a financial abyss and now it is waging ideological warfare. It is a slippery slope because our political system relies on separate judicial, legislative, and executive systems. However, it appears that the Prime Minister's omnipotence allows him to interfere with the other pillars of our democracy, in particular by attacking the very fundamental rights that he claims to be upholding. We disagree, and we are not the only ones.

Several Canadian organizations are standing up and saying that they do not want to be told what to think. That is not the government's role. They are uncomfortable signing a form that places them in a straitjacket. That is why we are asking the Prime Minister to put an immediate end to these ideological constraints he is imposing on organizations applying to the program. We saw several examples today, including summer camp organizations and people with other interesting projects who find themselves in a dilemma because they must make an ethical choice, a choice of conscience. That is what is at stake. The government wants to impose its ideological agenda, and that is unacceptable.

Justin Trudeau is entitled to his opinions and points of view, but he cannot impose them on everyone. This is not complicated; we are saying that the Canada summer jobs program is a program to create jobs. It is not a program for imposing an ideological point of view. What we are asking is that the government withdraw the attestation, withdraw the ideological criteria for a program that is intended for all Canadians, not just those who are on Justin Trudeau's bandwagon, or who are entitled—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I did not stop the hon. member the first time, but he has mentioned the family name of a member of the House twice now. Perhaps he will remember that he is to use the name of the riding or the member's title.

[English]

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Niagara Centre.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, has a long-standing relationship with the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, an organization that fights against a woman's right to choose. With the support of the Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform having been so critical to his leadership victory, it is not difficult to understand why the Leader of the Opposition has a vested interest in ensuring the centre can continue to rely on taxpayer funds to promote its anti-abortion agenda.

The Leader of the Opposition also gave a statement where he affirmed that he voted against transgender rights in Bill C-16. We know the Leader of the Opposition is against LBGTQ2 rights. He is against a woman's right to choose, and is against transgender rights.

I would ask the member, should attestation attach itself to the beliefs of the organization or to the belief that individuals who are applying for jobs not be discriminated against?

● (1300)

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I am saddened by my colleague's question, and especially by its preamble, which is a manifestation of the current government's partisan approach.

While we should be talking about creating jobs for Canadian youth, here he is launching a tirade bereft of all sense or values. That being said, I would like to apologize for having named the current Prime Minister. I do think that his father, former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, must roll over in his grave sometimes when he sees the current Prime Minister renouncing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by imposing his ideological agenda.

The question asked by the Liberal member only proves it. This is not a question about job creation, it is a partisan question aimed simply at bashing us because we do not think like the Prime Minister. I have the courage to say to the hon. member that here, in our party, we respect diversity and different points of view, while the Liberals are confined to an ideological agenda. I am very proud to be Canadian and a member of the Conservative Party.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is odd hearing my colleague say that they are here to uphold the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because I have the impression that, on the contrary, they started this debate to defend their ideology, which consists in working against women's rights.

It is true that the Liberals did a poor job of establishing criteria for the Canada summer jobs program. The criteria were very unclear and had to be changed. This created quite a stir in the media and in our communities, I agree. However, it is important to ask community organizations that apply to the Canada summer jobs program to attest that they comply with the Charter of Canadian Rights and Freedoms, women's rights, and LGBTQ2 community rights. I hope that my colleague agrees, because it is that simple. In my opinion, the groups in his riding also agree.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. Indeed, I could answer simply that I agree. That is why we started this debate today. We believe that it is important that government programs be based on the principles enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. That is what the government is currently attacking, and we believe that it is a slippery slope.

That being said, I had the opportunity to speak to my colleague earlier. The Liberals are making a mistake with this program, because they shortened the period during which young people have access to the program. This creates a precarious situation for young people during the period when they are not in school, which has the opposite effect of that intended by the program. However, this allows the Liberals to boast of having a wonderful program when, by digging a little deeper, we find that it is an ideological program that does not benefit young Canadians, since the Liberals have shortened the period during which they can work.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deadline for the Canada summer jobs program passed last month, but I am still hearing from groups and organizations from my riding and across Canada that are confused and unsure whether or not they will be approved for funding like they have in previous years.

These groups are not the monsters the Liberals are making them out to be. They are summer camps, food banks, groups working with at-risk youth and those challenged physically or emotionally, seniors homes, personal care facilities, and groups working with new refugees, helping them adjust to life in a new country, finding accommodation and helping them with English as a second language, and finding social networks to help new arrivals develop friendships and connections. To have the Liberal government attack them day in and day out in the media and here in the House is shameful and has left them feeling like enemies of their government.

Conservatives believe in Canadians' fundamental freedoms, the right to freedom of conscience, freedom of beliefs, and the right to freedom of expression. No one has the right to prevent others from advocating or expressing their beliefs, especially their government.

That is why Conservatives oppose the values test the Liberal government has imposed on applicants for Canada summer jobs grants. Under this test, if an organization does not sign the attestation agreeing with the ideological positions of the Liberal Party, the organization will no longer be eligible to receive funding for a summer student. Let me read part of the attestation:

[B]oth the job and the organization's core mandate respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as other rights. These include reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability or sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

As I already said, this is directly affecting groups in my riding and across Canada to the point that now many organizations have made the tough decision and have refused to apply for Canada's summer jobs program this year. I think about the loss of these important services. It is a huge loss to our community. Then I think of how the students themselves will be affected without a job this summer because of the misuse of this government program to favour the Liberals' ideological allies.

That is why I was happy to sponsor an electronic petition from a local resident, Joyce Stankiewicz, from New Hamburg in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga. Petition e-1484 reads as follows:

Whereas:

The current eligibility requirements of employers seeking to apply for Government of Canada funding through the Canada Summer Jobs Program require organizations to sign an attestation stating that their organization's core mandate respects individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as other rights, including reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression;

We believe that requiring organizations to attest that this is their organization's "core mandate" would force many organizations to choose between their beliefs, often rooted in their religion, and being able to receive funding; and

By its nature, this requirement discriminates against organizations based on their beliefs.

We, the undersigned, residents of Canada, call upon the Government of Canada to remove this discriminatory requirement and allow Canadians to continue to exercise their freedom of religion and freedom of expression without facing institutionalized discrimination by the Government of Canada.

This petition went live on February 6, a little over three weeks ago, and as of this morning had well over 6,100 signatures.

The government is out of touch with Canadians on its best day, but this is a new level of arrogance of the Liberal government two years into its first mandate.

The minister's response to these groups across Canada was, "Don't worry, just sign the attestation anyway." To be instructed to ignore one's deeply held beliefs and to sign an attestation which is diametrically opposite to one's fundamental world views is to encourage dishonesty. It promotes hypocrisy. For each of us here it is important that we aspire to the highest standards of integrity. In other words, we act on what we say we believe.

Sir Thomas More is often quoted as saying, "When statesmen forsake their private conscience for sake of their own public duties they lead their country by a short route to chaos." That is so true.

● (1305)

What the Liberals fundamentally fail to understand is that Canadians do have deeply held personal beliefs, beliefs they are unwilling to be forced to go against, and we as leaders should not be forcing them to forsake their private conscience.

In 2018, it is an absolute shame that I am hearing from groups in my riding who feel bullied and pressured by their government to sign an attestation that goes directly against their beliefs. One group that asked to remain anonymous told my staff, "We don't want our organization's name used because we are fearful that the Liberal government will cut our funding because we have spoken out." That is a shame. This group works with individuals with special needs. These are Canadians who deserve to be honoured and celebrated by our government, not attacked.

When the Prime Minister of Canada said that Canada is back, I am not so sure what he was talking about. Is he saying that Canada is back to discriminating against citizens who do not hold the same beliefs, or that Canada is back to attacking the rights of Canadians to freedom of speech, belief, and expression?

Another group in my riding that provides low-cost full-day camps for kids in junior kindergarten to grade 5 said in an email to my office, "We find that many of the families who register for the camps are able to do so because of their affordability. We filled 240 camp spaces...within a few weeks of opening registration in March and parents in our community have come to rely on them. We love to be able to make these programs available to our community and have always felt so fortunate to receive the summer job grants from the federal government to make them possible."

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The email goes on to say, “We value loving and blessing our neighbours and don't ever want to discriminate against any group, regardless of their beliefs. We believe in freedom of thought and religion. However, like many others, we will not in good conscience be able to sign the attestation as it is written into the new application. Our plan for application submission as directed by our denomination and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is to move forward and submit our application without checking off the attestation box on the application.”

By all accounts, by all indications given by the current government, this group, which provides subsidized child care spots to over 200 children throughout the summer in and around my riding, will now be rejected simply because they refused to go against their beliefs with respect to this unfair request of the government. What is the government's plan to help those parents who now cannot access affordable child care over the summer? I doubt very much that there even is a plan.

A pastor in Kanata, which is not far from here, wrote to his member of Parliament, the MP for Kanata—Carleton. In his letter he stated:

We have a wonderful evangelical congregation here.... It is active and vibrant, with a significant ongoing history of being very involved in the life of our community, and with a positive reputation for a high level of community involvement and impact. From the low-cost housing development behind our church building, including a 6-storey building and multiple townhouse-styled units, through past social projects like hospice care; from our monthly “Open Table” which offers free meals to some 140 guests, to sponsoring a Muslim Syrian refugee family of seven (now eight!); and from our international work in Mexico and last year in Rwanda, to local ministries like our onsite summer camp: we act on what we believe Jesus has asked us to do.

The pastor goes on to say later in his letter:

In short, our belief is that the government does not have the right to ask us to make any kind of statement which conflicts with our religious conscience. I need to tell you that what I have heard from the government over the past month makes remarkably clear that the government officials involved in this process simply do not know or understand us or our faith. It is sad that who we are, and what we do, is so radically unknown to our own government. We could be a great asset in the work of justice and good things. That's what we do; we do it well.

The Conservatives believe that Canadians know better than government what is good for them. We listened and consulted with community organizations across the country, because we believe that Canadians have a right to hold their own beliefs and to express themselves without fear of judgment from the federal government.

In the spirit of the motion, I hope that all members will agree that organizations that engage in non-political, non-activist work, such as feeding the homeless, helping refugees, and giving kids an opportunity to go to camp, should be able to access Canada summer jobs funding, regardless of their private convictions and regardless of whether or not they choose to sign the application attestation. It is my sincere hope that all members of the House will have the freedom to vote their conscience on this very crucial issue that affects all Canadians.

● (1310)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the list of services that the member is worried will not receive Canada summer jobs grants: children's camps, meals on wheels programs, and support for

immigrants and refugees who arrive in this country. Those core jobs, none of which involve violating people's human rights or basic charter rights, are all eligible under the attestation. Additionally, the core job of a church is not to challenge charter rights in a political fashion but rather to support a moral framework under which one receives one's human rights.

The attestation does not require churches or organizations to surrender their religious beliefs or violate their moral code. All it says is that the core organizational structure of the applicant cannot be a political one aimed at violating people's rights.

For example, there was an organization in my riding that was receiving funding effectively to hand out postcards, next to summer camps, of little babies that were being tortured in some grotesque display. It was hideous. That now has been ruled as an illegal practice in the province of Ontario. That organization, whose only goal is to remove a woman's right to choice, is exactly what should not be funded in the same way that a political party should not be funded through the Canada summer jobs program.

If the member is really serious about protecting kids' summer jobs, what is the problem with signing the attestation if the core values of the organization and the job are not about violating charter rights but about providing a summer camp for kids? Why can they not be convinced to sign it?

● (1315)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that it is not primarily members on this side of the House nor is it people in churches across this country who have been the loudest spokespeople on this. We have heard from non-profit groups that provide care for refugees, from non-profit groups that provide care for seniors or mentally and physically handicapped people.

This is about individual freedom of speech and freedom of expression and being forced to sign a statement with which one fundamentally disagrees. Many colleagues on that side say to just sign it and turn the other way and get the money. There are many of us on this side of the House who are not prepared to sell our soul for that kind of activity. There are many in this country who are also not willing to sign an attestation that is diametrically opposite to their fundamental world view.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of all things, the government is calling this a values test. If the Liberals want to perform a values test, they should talk to the Prime Minister before he goes away on a family vacation to India. A values test imposes on a person's legal thought and values. There is a box that has to be checked, and if the answer does not agree with the Prime Minister's opinion, the organization or whomever will not get any funding.

Small businesses in my riding, not-for-profit organizations, charitable organizations, and their employees and volunteers all pay taxes. However, because they do not believe or think like the Prime Minister, their taxes are not eligible for public funding. Is that fair?

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Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, there is no question about the unfairness. It is a totalitarian action to force groups to agree with the ideological position of the government.

In my riding, over the last 12 years, there are probably hundreds of groups, organizations, and small businesses that have benefited from this funding and they would continue to benefit. This year many of them have signed the application without signing the attestation. According to what we are hearing, they will be rejected. They are the ones who drew my attention to the fact that there was such a thing. They came to me. Many of them, even after reading the full application along with the attestation, are not going to bother to apply. That is the bigger shame. We are going to lose out on the projects and activities, the good work these community groups do in our communities. Probably thousands of summer students will be without that work experience to equip them to go on to a more permanent job. It is a sad day.

• (1320)

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be splitting my time with the member for Cambridge.

It is a privilege to rise in this House and speak about Canada summer jobs and our government's commitment to quality youth employment in this country.

In fact, it is youth that inspired me to enter politics. I looked at my daughter and her friends, and the future that they aspired to, and felt that I could make a difference in the lives of these young girls as well as young girls across Canada. I am sure all members of this House would agree that the Canada summer jobs program is an important part of how government helps young Canadians gain important job experience, which ultimately helps grow our economy and our middle class.

The program is very well received by both employers and students in my riding of Fundy Royal. In fact, I am so impressed by the number of organizations and small businesses that embrace this opportunity to offer students that valuable experience while also benefiting from more hands on deck during peak times. I thank these organizations for their commitment and contribution to our communities.

Unfortunately, we have had concerns raised by Canadians about funding going to organizations that actively undermine the rights of Canadians, meaning that we had youth undertaking activities, funded by the government, that worked against the rights of women and LGBTQ2 communities, for example. It is these concerns that spurred our government to take action. That action was to make changes to the Canada summer jobs application process, changes to ensure that a young person in a job funded by the government would work in an environment that respects the rights of all Canadians, including women and the LGBTQ2 community, and that funded organizations realize their responsibility as employers to provide this environment.

In contrast, we know the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, has a long-standing relationship with the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, an organization that fights against a woman's right to choose. Nine months ago, during his leadership campaign, he spoke with the Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform's director of communications, Jonathon Van Maren, who

said, "Like most of you, I've known who my top choices are for months...Scheer actually is pro-life and has a record to prove it." He knew this because the Leader of the Opposition told the centre, "I have always voted in favour of pro-life legislation. I voted according to my conscience every time. I spoke out when Henry Morgentaler received the Order of Canada."

With the support of the Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform having been so critical to the leadership victory, it is not difficult to understand why the Leader of the Opposition has a vested interest in continuing to ensure that the centre can continue to rely on taxpayer funds to promote this anti-abortion agenda. This lack of respect for the rights of Canadians is not new, or from just the leader. In fact, in 2005, the former member for Fundy Royal, Rob Moore, put forth a private member's bill, an act to confirm the definition of marriage. He said:

There is now a great concern in Canada that if same sex marriage is legalized, it will have a profound and long-lasting implication for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, and it will become increasingly difficult for people who do not agree with same sex marriage to participate in public life.

That is not what we stand for.

The Canada summer jobs program is an important part of our government's youth employment strategy. We must ensure that funding from this program is not used to undermine individual human rights. Simply put, Canadians expect us to make sure that Canada summer jobs funding respects the hard-earned rights of all Canadians.

Our youth employment strategy is the Government of Canada's commitment to help Canada's newest workers get a strong start to their careers. We need to take a whole-of-government approach when it comes to administering this strategy. In fact, the youth employment strategy is delivered by 11 federal departments and agencies across government. It helps Canadians between the ages of 15 and 30 obtain the information, and develop the job skills, abilities, and experience they need to get quality jobs.

Since 2005, the strategy has helped more than 900,000 young Canadians get the skills, competences, and experience they need to get those quality jobs, something we can all be proud of. This important strategy has three complementary programs: first, skills link; second, career focus; and third, summer work experience, which is part of the Canada summer jobs program.

The skills link stream helps vulnerable and under-represented youth, facing barriers to employment, develop the skills they need to find a job or to go back to school. With skills link, we are focusing on single parents, youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, young newcomers, and youth in rural and remote areas.

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Career focus is our second stream, and it helps post-secondary graduates find work through paid internships. This important stream provides youth with the information and experience they need to make informed career decisions, find a job, or pursue advanced studies.

● (1325)

The third component is a summer work experience stream, which includes Canada summer jobs. It offers subsidies to employers to create summer jobs for high school and post-secondary students.

Taken together, these three streams form the core of our youth employment strategy. This important strategy is helping youth get the much needed employment, while helping meet the changing needs of a new and increasingly globalized economy.

That is why each year we have invested over \$330 million into this strategy. Investments in our last two budgets will help more than 33,000 vulnerable youths, create 15,000 new green jobs for youth, and provide more than 1,600 jobs for youth which focus on Canadian heritage.

Since 2016, we have created up to 35,000 additional summer jobs for youth every year. In 2017, Canada summer jobs doubled the number of jobs created in 2015. To further expand the strategy, our government committed to providing an additional \$395 million in our 2017 budget. In budget 2018, our government proposed to provide an additional \$448.5 million over five years to the strategy, starting in 2018-2019.

This funding will support the continued doubling of the number of job placements funded under the Canada summer jobs program in the 2019-2020 years, and provide additional resources for a modernized youth employment strategy in the following years, building on the input of an expert panel on youth employment. A renewed youth employment strategy will be announced over the course of this year.

That is how much importance we place on this program, because we know Canada summer jobs is critical to ensuring Canada's youth across the country have an opportunity to gain valuable work experience. That is what this program is about, job experience for youth.

As I have said, our government is focused on ensuring all government funding respects the rights of Canadians, especially women and the LGBTQ2 community who fought hard for those rights. These changes we made to Canada summer jobs will ensure we avoid any funding going to organizations that actively undermine those rights. We asked organizations this year to confirm that both the job and the organization's core mandate respect individual human rights and labour laws, and that they do not support discriminatory activities.

As our government has already stated, the changes we have made to the program are not about excluding faith-based groups. Religious and faith-based groups often undertake work that focuses on helping those most in need in our society, which is exactly what we have welcomed and encouraged for organizations throughout Fundy Royal, as they have done in the past. We value their contribution.

We are committed to the continued support of the Canada summer jobs program that funds jobs that respect the rights of all Canadians. The changes we have made to the program will help ensure a young person in a job funded by the government will work in an environment that respects every Canadian's human rights.

This is the right thing to do to make sure that Canada summer jobs is not used to pursue the removal or undermining of established individual human rights in Canada. These changes have strengthened our Canada summer jobs program, as well as our employment youth strategy.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's presentation, and to be quite frank, I was very disappointed in the way she painted with such a broad brush the faith-based communities as being opposed to basic human rights, and the issues around the attestation.

I remind her that the right to freedom of belief and opinion is guaranteed by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Most Canadians should be very concerned with the direction the government is going in basing funding decisions on whether someone holds a certain belief.

I would like to talk about an organization with which the people in Alberta and across the country are quite familiar. I am receiving hundreds of letters from my constituents, for example, Catholic churches, Protestant churches, and other churches saying they typically have summer programs, and now cannot hire anyone because they cannot affirm the attestation.

The Mustard Seed in Calgary ministers to tens of thousands of Albertans, vulnerable and homeless people, and typically has accessed this program to allow young people to see the plight of homelessness and feed them. However, it is saying it is not going to get pushed into the government's attestation, and the fact that it wants to take it from a neutral position into an affirmative position on certain issues it has never taken a position on before. Consequently, many young people are not going to be able to serve.

With all due respect, what is next? We are doing this on Canada summer jobs. If we do not line up exactly the way the government sees, which program will be next?

● (1330)

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Mr. Speaker, as I have seen with other issues in the past, often the words that are so offensive to groups do not come from our side of the House. We did not talk about a broad-based approach to faith groups. In fact, many of us have reached out to the faith groups in our communities to thank them for the good work they are doing in our communities, and encourage them to apply.

I would also like to take this opportunity to read the actual attestation, because nowhere in it does it talk about beliefs or values.

CSJ applicants will be required to attest that both the job and the organization's core mandate respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as other rights. These include reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

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This is not a values test. This is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been part of the student summer job program for the 10 years I have been here, and every year I sit down, and go through the list that the bureaucracy makes up for me. I go through it, and wonder if it meets the requirements, and there is a point system that decides who gets the cash. We may adjust it to make sure we share the program with as many community-based organizations as possible, so that everybody has a chance to take advantage of this program.

This year I will not participate, because this year a lot of the groups that were on that list, a lot of community organizations, small towns, and villages will not apply, because they will not sign the attestation. This is ridiculous.

When will the Liberal government come to its senses and realize what it is doing is absolutely wrong?

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that my colleague has decided not to participate in this program. In the past, I have taken considerable time to look at the organizations in my riding that are doing very valuable work. As members of Parliament we have a very intimate relationship with many of these organizations, and know exactly the good work they are doing. I find it unfortunate that the member is not taking a leadership role, and ensuring the students in his riding have the best quality job experience that they can this summer.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I get into my remarks, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London on a bit of a personal note. She is bringing this forward as the opposition motion today, but she is also the member of Parliament for my in-laws, Pat and Allan Alward. Allan, as she knows, recently suffered a stroke. If the member was able to thank the staff, nurses, and doctors, at the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital, my family and I would really appreciate it and thank her.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to provide our government's perspective on an issue that is at the heart of our employment objectives for the young people of our country, the issue of access and respect in the workplace. Canada summer jobs has been a very successful Government of Canada program that has offered thousands of youth job opportunities since it was first created. The program has been reaching its objective to give young people the opportunity to acquire work and life experience while supporting community-based initiatives. These are simple objectives. The spirit of the program is to open doors for young people, and perhaps help them make choices as they prepare for employment. In this context, the organizations that provide quality employment to young people through the Canada summer jobs program are as varied as the economic sectors in the country.

The CSJ program provides funding to non-profit organizations, public sector employers, and small businesses with 50 or fewer employees. The range of activities is therefore almost unlimited. There are a number of eligibility criteria that employees must meet, but there is one key requirement underlying that eligibility, and that is respect.

We have been clear and vocal enough about our basic values over the past two years. They are values like inclusion, compassion, and respect. We have been trying to integrate those values into our policies and programs, like the progressive trade agenda and the inclusion of human factors in environmental assessments. This year, the Canada summer jobs program includes an element whereby applicants are required to attest that both the job and the organization's core mandate respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

While there has been some representation on behalf of some groups and persons who have been critical of the evaluation criteria, we know it is our duty to preserve our values and to make sure our programs respect individual human rights, including the values underlying the charter. These are the values of the people of Canada, and they include reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.

I have no qualms in promoting a measure that will prevent Government of Canada funding from flowing to organizations whose core mandates or projects may not respect individual human rights, the values underlying the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This measure will help prevent young people as young as 15 years of age from being exposed to employment with organizations that may promote positions that are contrary to the values enshrined in the charter. What we are in fact doing here is maintaining the full integrity of the CSJ and making it reflect the society we live in today.

Our government is not the only one to think that way. Across Canada, people are supporting our approach. We received an open letter from the National Association of Women and the Law. This open letter was signed by over 80 major organizations across Canada. Organizations like Oxfam Canada and YWCA Canada signed the letter. Other signatories include organizations coming from the four corners of Canada. Let me name a few: Abortion Support Services Atlantic, Alberta Pro-Choice Coalition, Shelter House Thunder Bay, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Saskatoon Sexual Health, and Positive Living North, just to name a few.

Organizations helping youth from under-represented groups are supporting us. They include organizations such as the Network of Black Business & Professional Women, the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, as well as the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

● (1335)

Members are probably wondering what this open letter says. It says how supportive they are of this year's eligibility requirements for CSJ applicants. The association wrote, in black and white:

Significant misinformation has been widely circulated in the media about the nature of the attestation that is now required by organizations that wish to apply for federal government grants for student jobs through the CSJ program. We are confident that the safeguards introduced to the CSJ program are not discriminatory, and do not represent any infringement on freedom of religion, conscience, or any other rights that people in Canada enjoy.

This comes from an organization that promotes equal rights for women in Canada. This is an organization that has played a major role in reaching important milestones towards women's equality in Canada, such as the inclusion of sections 15 and 28 in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, amendments to sexual assault laws, positive changes to family law and to the Divorce Act, rape shield legislation, and criminal harassment legislation.

Strong voices across Canada are being raised in support of this year's eligibility requirements for CSJ applicants. This display of support is just one example. There are many more supporters of the attestation that is now required by CSJ applicants.

Canadians know how great the Canada summer jobs program is. The CSJ has brought significant benefits to a very large number of Canadians over the decades. The overall objectives of the program are unchanged. They are to provide work experience for students, to support organizations including those that provide important community services, and to recognize that local circumstances, community needs, and priorities vary widely. With this in mind, the Government of Canada seeks to ensure that youth job opportunities funded by the Canada summer jobs program take place in an environment that respects the rights of all Canadians.

Is it too much to ask that a Government of Canada program respect the individual human rights and the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? That all seems reasonable for our government, as well as to major stakeholders, such as the National Association of Women and the Law. I hope that all members of the House will come to the same conclusion.

On a personal note, this is a program that I have long been involved in, longer than I have been a member of Parliament. Being a former manager of the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club, I have used this program to hire hundreds if not thousands of students over my time. I can tell the House that as a member of Parliament, I have taken advantage of the opportunity to go to not one or two, not just the YMCA, but literally every organization in my riding that uses this program. I have learned so much about my riding as a result. It is truly a remarkable program and I think that this will continue to be a great program as it evolves.

I know the minister is doing a review on youth employment. I am sure there will be additional changes. However, we have to recognize the underlying issue here. We are forging ahead with our goal of strengthening the middle class and creating a level playing field where everyone has a chance to succeed. This is our vision and this is our commitment.

• (1340)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal members have said that they thanked the faith-based groups, that there is significant misinformation, and that they are encouraging them to apply. Those who have applied have been turned down. They have called my office, and I am sure they have called his office, and all members' offices, saying that they could not sign the attestation. Some of them even amended the attestation, submitted, and resubmitted it. In each case, even though the Liberal members were encouraging them to apply and reapply, they were turned down. Why were they turned down? They could not agree

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with the Liberal philosophy that their core mandate must be a Liberal core mandate.

Liberal members say that people should apply, but that they must "bow the knee". That is objectionable and that is why this year many people who would have applied or would have qualified are going to be disqualified.

Would the member agree that there are more people in Canada right now who are not going to have access to these jobs because of this new attestation requirement?

Mr. Bryan May: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite, my colleague on the human resources committee, for his question.

I was one of those members of Parliament who reached out to all of the organizations in my riding, not just faith-based organizations but all of them. I do this every year. We go through the entire application.

With what the member is proposing or suggesting, the only way an organization would have been approved last year and not approved this year is if they did not fill out the application. There is not a government program where one can pick and choose fields to apply to.

If the organizations filled it out, if they checked that box, then they are going to be considered, as every other organization. There is nothing in that attestation that says "beliefs". In the conversations I have had in my riding, the organizations that I have talked to, that I have had the opportunity to speak with and to explain to, understand that. They have applied. They have checked the box, and I would be more than happy to make sure they have funding.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to let Canadians know something today. If they are looking for diversity and inclusiveness, on this side of the floor, I am pro-life and many of my colleagues are pro-choice. As well, there are differing perspectives on marriage and LGBTQ.

We all work together. On this side of the floor, we are not hemmed in by a certain ideology of our leadership. I say to members on that side of the floor, "I know you are there, but you dare not speak."

I have people in my riding who have come to me and said that they are representing their rural municipalities, and they need this funding. It is good funding. However, they are being told that they have to indicate that they agree with this attestation, yet for employers in the province of Saskatchewan, labour laws do not allow them to put boxes on their forms that say if they want the funding, they should tick off that they are indigenous, or tick off that they are LGBTQ. That is against the labour laws.

That just shows how convoluted this whole thing is, just to deal with an issue that the government will not come out and just deal with.

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● (1345)

Mr. Bryan May: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard a question there, but I will take the opportunity to talk about the fact that there is nothing in the attestation that talks about beliefs. It is not there. Show me where it says that this is an attack on beliefs in the attestation. It is simply not there.

When I was talking with organizations that were concerned about this. First, they had not read it, and second, they were going by false claims in the media. Once I showed them the attestation, do you know what they said? They said, "Oh, that's fine."

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just for the purpose of clarification, could the hon. member describe the difference between belief and the purpose of the use, which I think is the core issue here.

Mr. Bryan May: Mr. Speaker, again, there is nothing in the attestation that talks about belief. There is nothing in there that refers specifically to belief.

The support information that the department provided explains that. It shows exactly what the issue is, and what we are trying to achieve with this attestation. There is nothing in there that says anything about beliefs.

Again, this is spin in the media. It is spin by the opposition. The organizations that we have talked to love this program. They are going to apply for this program. Those that do not either do not understand the attestation, or it is a political move.

The Deputy Speaker: Just for the benefit of all hon. members, this does come up from time to time, and I mean this as no criticism of the hon. member for Cambridge's inquiry about the fact that there was not a question. In fact, members are free to pose a question in that period, but they can also make a comment as well. It is not just the hon. member for Cambridge. This does come up from time to time. This is just to let hon. members know that they are free to do either.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my great colleague from Milton.

The last Liberal member of Parliament said that he loves this program, that he has worked longer on this program than he has been a member of Parliament, and that he has been out there promoting this program. May I remind him that it was the Conservatives who were the Government of Canada two years ago? As a matter of fact, we were the Government of Canada for 10 years. At the time when he was promoting this program, he had no problem with it, but today we are debating this issue in the House.

This program has been very well accepted right across this country. As a member of Parliament for 20 years, I have used this program to ensure its objectives, as has been mentioned in the House. What is the primary objective? It is jobs for children and helping organizations when they need extra workers. That is the primary reason.

There are multiple organizations in this country, as is guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Let us quote what the Prime

Minister said, "a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian". By the way, I said it before he did. We cannot choose which Canadian is right and which Canadian is wrong. This is the problem with the Canada summer jobs program.

For the first time in my riding, I have received letters that complain about what the government wants to do with this program. It is a very successful non-partisan program helping Canadian children and employers, and yet for the first time, under this government, we are now having a division on this great program.

Today, many Canadians are upset. As my colleague from Saskatchewan just said, she has received a lot of letters from people saying they have been denied. On the basis of what were they denied? They were denied on the basis of an idea that the Prime Minister had. It was his social agenda idea. Why is he imposing his social agenda on Canadians? All Canadians have the rights the charter gives them, faith-based or whatever. They are all entitled to Government of Canada programs, which should not be based upon the ideology of a leader or anyone. The government should enable every Canadian to access those programs. It is Canadians' right to access government programs.

Why are we changing this now? Everyone has said that this is a great program that has benefited everyone. We should not be debating this, but we are debating it here today because one person has a social agenda and wants this country to move in that direction. That is not going to happen, because Canadians are very concerned about their fundamental rights and whether this infringes upon them or not.

The fundamental point is that it is Canadians' right to access government programs. It is not the right of the government to choose winners and losers. Hon. members of Parliament, including me, have a history of how this program has worked so well for young people and for businesses.

Let me give an example from my riding. The Mustard Seed is a great organization that looks after homeless people. This is its mandate. However, under the current government, The Mustard Seed will not be able to apply. Is this not wrong? An organization is looking after 10,000 homeless, impoverished, and drug-addicted people, and the government would not give them money because of its social ideology. That is wrong.

● (1350)

Let me talk about another one, the New Canadian Friendship Centre in Calgary. It provides free classes and support for new Canadians, regardless of culture, faith, and gender. It does not discriminate. It is open to all newcomers. It does not matter what their faith or religion is, yet the government is discriminating against it. While the friendship centre is not discriminating against anybody, the government is discriminating against it by not approving its application on the basis that it does not meet the government's social agenda.

Statements by Members

Let me remind the Liberals, when they talk about the Government of Canada, that this is not the Government of Canada but the Liberal government, because we were the Government of Canada two years ago, for 10 years, running this program. Let us be very clear. This is a Liberal agenda, not a Government of Canada agenda. The Liberals are pushing their own values onto people in Canada who may or may not agree, which should not matter.

These organizations are out there to provide services to all Canadians, as the last speaker said. He brought up the YMCA. I am very happy he talked about that. The YMCA is very good. So is The Mustard Seed society. So is the friendship centre. All of these organizations are there for the primary purpose of helping Canadians who need that service. The government has chosen to allow only those people who follow its social agenda to get Government of Canada money, which is fundamentally wrong. It is very interesting that the Liberals say they want to have them sign based on the Charter of Rights. The Charter of Rights also gives them the right to access this money. They are taking some organizations right away, and asking others to sign.

My colleague from Saskatchewan said that she has received multiple letters, as have many of my colleagues on this side, from people who used to get this money and are now being denied. Why are they being denied? Has their mandate to provide services to Canadians changed? No, it has not. The Liberals have changed the mandate of eligibility to meet their social agenda.

There is something fundamentally wrong with this system. It is fundamentally wrong that Canadians cannot access a Government of Canada program that should be open to everyone who can meet the criteria that were always there, without changing them, so that they can meet the objective of this program, which is providing services to Canadians. It is a bit much for the government to come here and for the Liberal members to stand up and talk about how great this program is, how nothing has happened, and try to defend it. When they try to defend it here, we can see that they are reading their points.

Let us talk about the basics. A program that has already been successful is now being changed. Now what do we have? We have a debate. Why did they bring this division? Was this division necessary for student summer jobs, for organizations that provide services? We do not need this division in politics here. The Liberal government, with its divisive politics, is sending the wrong message to all Canadians. On this side of the House, we will stand up and speak on what is right for all Canadians. We will not let the Liberal government get away with bringing its agenda into this.

• (1355)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member really has a misunderstanding of the reality of the situation. It is not about values and beliefs. It is about activities. I can appreciate the concern the Conservatives have, based on some of the previous actions and comments from the leader of the official opposition, who is being held to account in many different ways with respect to what his beliefs are, for example in terms of a woman's right to choose. It is important for us to recognize how it is that the Conservative opposition is being motivated to say the types of things it is saying.

It is about the activities. I would question any and all members as to whether they have a problem with government dollars being used to hire students, for example, to go door to door handing out abortion leaflets. That is what it is about, the activities.

My question for the member is this. Why does he not encourage the wonderful groups that promote and hire for student camps, many of which the Conservatives seem to want to discourage from entering that process? Why not promote the student program? It is a good program.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I love this member. He likes to ask questions. He somehow just keeps twisting everything to fit into his ideal world.

The member is talking about activities. Let me ask him, what is wrong with the activity of The Mustard Seed society? What is wrong with the activity of the New Canadian Friendship Centre, which is meeting newcomers?

I would also tell the member that when he was not in government but sitting on this side here, he had no problem with this program. Today, he has a problem. Where did he get this nonsense he is talking about that we are going out handing out brochures for the organizations? Did he not listen to the last member who spoke from our side? He was not sitting in his chair. She said that she is pro-life and others are pro-choice. I do not know what he is talking about here.

• (1400)

The Deputy Speaker: There will be two and a half minutes remaining in the time for questions and comments with the hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

PRIME MINISTER'S TRIP TO INDIA

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and 19 of his colleagues spent a lovely break week in India complete with costumes, music, and dancing. It was quite the production. The Prime Minister certainly embarrassed us, but what is even more upsetting is that he undermined Quebec's potential economic development.

In the space of a week, the Prime Minister found a way to insult millions of Quebec sovereignists by comparing them to terrorists, as reported by the Punjabi government. Then he found a way to insult the Punjabi government by accusing it of lying. He also insulted the Indian government twice over, once by inviting a Sikh terrorist to join his delegation and again by accusing it of plotting to sneak said terrorist into the Canadian delegation. I hope everyone realizes what a mess he has made.

The Prime Minister sabotaged every aspect of our relationship with a country that is on track to become the world's fifth-largest economy. This is a diplomatic disaster that could cost Quebec businesses dearly.

*Statements by Members***THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF SUMGAI TRAGEDY**

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the 30th anniversary of the Sumgait tragedy, which occurred in February 1988 in Azerbaijan. This was a time marked by serious acts of violence, riots, and widespread looting during which Armenian civilians were attacked and killed. This unprecedented violence shocked the entire world.

Thirty years later, Armenians are commemorating these tragic events in which many lost their lives. This anniversary reminds us of what a privilege it is to live in a country where diversity and inclusion make us strong and where various ethnic and religious communities can participate equally in our country's political life. This anniversary also reminds us that, as Canadians, we have a duty to condemn all acts of violence and to play an active role in promoting and preserving peace in Canada and around the world.

* * *

[English]

HOME AND GARDEN SHOWS

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members may have noticed that there is a hint of spring in the air this week. In Dufferin—Caledon, that is a sign that our local home shows are right around the corner.

In both Caledon and Orangeville, our home shows offer local businesses the opportunity to showcase their products and services to constituents thinking about sprucing things up this spring.

In Orangeville, the 2018 Lions Home & Garden Show runs at the Orangeville Fairgrounds on April 6, April 7, and April 8. Over 200 booths will be showcasing everything to do with home improvement, lawn and garden, and more.

In Caledon, the Chamber of Commerce's Spring Home Show 2018 runs at the Albion Bolton Community Centre on April 20, April 21, and April 22. The show is a “shop local” experience, where constituents can find great deals on items related to their home and garden living.

I encourage all residents of Dufferin—Caledon to come check out the Orangeville and Caledon home shows in April.

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[Translation]

FRAUD PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March is Fraud Prevention Month. Throughout the month, there will be initiatives to make consumers aware of white collar crime and to remind Canadians that financial crime costs \$5 billion a year.

My thoughts go out to the victims of fraud, identity theft, stock manipulation, corruption, counterfeiting, and other financial crimes. Over the past year, I have met some wonderful people who are working on the front lines to combat white collar crime.

I humbly thank my friends at the Competition Bureau, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, Revenue Canada, the Canadian Bar Association, and the RCMP for their work and collaboration.

I strongly urge all of my colleagues to join me in making Canadians aware of the need to be informed so that they can better detect, counter, and report fraud.

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[English]

PHARMACARE

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should not have to worry about draining their savings or remortgaging their home for the sake of their health. That is why the Canadian government should fight to protect and expand health care in Canada.

Unfortunately, the Liberals are letting us down on both counts. They failed to protect medicare when they held the provinces to Stephen Harper's miserly funding plan. When Saskatchewan violated the Canada Health Act by allowing private clinics to charge for insured services, they made a little noise for show and then looked the other way.

Recently the Liberals had a tepid announcement about pharmacare, but the finance minister is already backpedalling on the promise. Once again, conflict of interest concerns swirl around the finance minister, as Morneau Shepell does big business consulting on private benefit plans. That is why the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions have called for him to retract his statements and recuse himself from the work of the national advisory council on pharmacare.

For too long, those who would make their fortunes on the backs of sick Canadians have held up progress on a pharmacare plan. I urge the finance minister to take the advice of Canada's nurses, and for the government to get going on a real universal pharmacare plan.

* * *

● (1405)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over a century on International Women's Day, we have made pledges and given flowers. It is not enough. Internationally, we need leadership to fully implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda and to fight against gender inequality and gender-based violence. Canada's new national action plan is our response, and UN resolution 1325 our commitment.

Around the world, women and girls are strong survivors of horrific conflicts in which they are targeted. I call on all of us to stand with Yazidi, Rohingya, and Sudanese women. It is why I introduced Motion No. 163, calling for a women, peace, and security ambassador. Let us proactively institute programs that inspire participation of women in peacekeeping and for the prevention of conflict and gender-based violence.

Statements by Members

In partnership with our strong Canadian feminist movement, budget 2018 committed \$2 billion to advance gender equality and peace around the world. I call on all members to support Motion No. 163.

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CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actions have consequences, something the Liberal government seems to have forgotten. Take, for example, the Liberal implementation of an ideological litmus test for the Canada summer jobs program. The requirement that applicants support the Liberal Party position on hot-button social issues actually hurts Canadian children.

“Which children?” one may ask. How about the children in 24 aboriginal reserves across western Canada whose 5-day clubs have been historically funded through the Canada summer jobs program? These children, some of whom come from difficult family situations, were able to benefit from a summer program that cared about their needs and brought a little joy to their lives for part of their summer. However, because the sponsoring organization, Child Evangelism Fellowship, does not subscribe to Liberal values it is ineligible to apply for funding.

Child Evangelism Fellowship cares about these children on these reserves. If the Liberal Party also cared about them, it would drop the silly, irrelevant, ideological litmus test for the Canada summer jobs program so more children could be helped by these clubs.

* * *

360°KIDS

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Wednesday I had the privilege of announcing our government's support for 360°kids' every bike matters program. This \$800,000 program brought our government's long-standing investment in 360° kids to \$3 million.

Based in Richmond Hill, 360°kids addresses the needs of youth at risk from all angles, surrounding kids in crisis with much-needed care. Only by applying a holistic support system can we do our part to help those youth most at risk.

Tonight, for the fourth year in a row, I will participate in the 360° Experience, spending the night on the streets of York Region. This brief window into the reality facing our most vulnerable youth is an important perspective for any representative.

I look forward to seeing 360°kids flourish and continue its work with Richmond Hill's most vulnerable, supported by a government that understands opportunities for youth and investment in our future.

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next week we will celebrate International Women's Day. It is an opportunity for all Canadians to celebrate women's contributions to our country and the progress we have made toward achieving gender equality.

This year's theme is #MyFeminism. It highlights the importance of our own actions to end gender bias, gender stereotypes, and all forms of gender-based violence. It reminds us we can each be inspirational role models, especially for young people, and be part of the solution to creating a diverse, respectful, inclusive society.

I invite all Canadians to join this conversation by using the #MyFeminism and describe what feminism means to them and share inspiring stories of how their friends, families, and communities are advancing equality.

I would also like to welcome the students from the University of Toronto's women in the House program, in particular my shadow, Enza Gurgis. I hope some of them will be in the House some day.

● (1410)

The Speaker: I remind the hon. member for Winnipeg South and other members that only the Speaker draws attention to people who are in the galleries.

The hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Leamington.

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CHATHAM HOPE HAVEN

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the pleasure of attending the grand opening of the Chatham Hope Haven shelter for homeless men. It is not just a safe place to sleep; it is where staff and volunteers are able to help homeless men re-enter society and change lives for the better.

After two years of renovations, the doors are open and overnight services are now available to homeless men in Chatham-Kent—Leamington.

The director of Hope Haven, Joe Simpson, took the time to thank the community and give special recognition to countless individuals who gave their time and money, including fundraising efforts by students from Indian Creek Road Public School, the Merlin legion, as well as monthly volunteer commitments from the Emmanuel Baptist Church youth group among other churches and organizations. Representatives of the Lions Club presented a cheque for \$1,500 to the shelter.

All in all, the shelter is a reflection of our community's love and commitment to help those most in need, with a warm meal, a warm bed, and a warm smile in a sometimes cold world.

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OPIOIDS

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a constituent of mine recently lost her nephew to a fentanyl overdose. It is not the first loss our country or my community has faced because of the opioid crisis. If we do not keep working to change historic and failed drug policies, it will not be the last.

Statements by Members

In 2016, opioids killed almost 3,000 Canadians, and last year, over 4,000 Canadians. We need new solutions.

We need to treat drug abuse as a health issue, expand harm reduction and treatment options, and remove the criminal sanction for low-level possession to stop stigmatizing the very people we want to save.

I am proud that our government has expanded safe consumption sites and provided over \$200 million in this year's budget to address the opioid crisis, including to improve access to treatment services, but we need to do more.

Portugal has proven that a public health approach can reduce problematic drug use, HIV transmission rates, drug-related deaths, and significantly increase the number of people who seek treatment.

We need to follow the evidence to save lives.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am calling on all feminists as International Women's Day is on March 8.

[*Translation*]

We have made a lot of progress, but a lot of work remains to be done. This year's theme is #MyFeminism. It underscores the importance of our own actions in ending prejudice, stereotypes, and all forms of sexual violence.

[*English*]

I am inspired by the women around me who are doing so much for gender equity in business, in the arts, and in sports, "Yeah Olympians".

This weekend, I was at ACTRA, Toronto's 75th anniversary awards. The president of the organization, Theresa Tova, brought everyone to their feet as allies against sexual harassment and in favour of gender equity. It was an inspiring moment.

The Award of Excellence winner, Jennifer Podemski, exemplified standing up and making change.

We can bring change together.

[*Translation*]

Happy International Women's Day.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADA-INDIA RELATIONS

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me take a moment today to tell the House why India matters.

India is a vibrant democracy, projected to be the fifth largest economy in the world. By next year, it is projected to be the fastest growing economy in the world.

Canada is home to 1.2 million Indo Canadians, the fourth largest diaspora in the western world. This diaspora has immensely contributed to enriching Canada's socio-economic fabric.

Two prime minister visits and two governor general visits, of which I was part, cemented our solid relationship, based on trade, people-to-people ties, and, most important, on the world stage, shared values.

The recent tourist visit by the Prime Minister to India, highlighted by immature diplomacy and Liberal electoral interests, has crash-landed this important relationship. It looks like a repeat of the former Liberal government's Canada-India ties.

A strong relationship with our Commonwealth partner is in the best interests of Canada.

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[*Translation*]

GREAT BIG CRUNCH

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today for the third year in a row I welcomed to Parliament Hill dozens of children and representatives from Food Secure Canada on the occasion of a wonderful event, the Great Big Crunch.

Many have joined me in acknowledging the need to offer healthier food to our children. As we are currently developing a Canadian food policy and a healthy food strategy, we have to remember to put children at the centre of our considerations. Ensuring good health for our children today guarantees better health for all Canadians of tomorrow, and I am not just saying that from the point of view of a grandfather.

I want to acknowledge the remarkable work of the Coalition for Healthy School Food and Food Secure Canada, which supports this cause and advances it every day. I invite all of my colleagues to bite into an apple with me and 300,000 children across the country as a symbol of our commitment to better nutrition.

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● (1415)

[*English*]

KINDER MORGAN PIPELINE

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been in this place since 2011 speaking out against Kinder Morgan's plan to build a new bitumen pipeline from Edmonton to Burnaby.

I have warned the Prime Minister that there will be dire consequences if he continues with his plan to ram this pipeline through communities and unceded first nations territories without consent. I have warned the natural resources minister that his threats to use the military against British Columbians will only serve to deepen the intensity of the opposition. Unfortunately, this is all coming true.

A recent Insights West poll found 10% of British Columbians were willing to engage in civil disobedience to stop this pipeline. That is tens of thousands of people who are willing to be arrested to stop Kinder Morgan, and it is coming soon.

In a few days, indigenous communities impacted by Kinder Morgan are beginning what they deem front-line resistance along the pipeline route and pledge to do “whatever it takes” to stop Kinder Morgan, including mass mobilization on March 10.

It is madness for the government to continue with its support for this pipeline. I urge it to stop.

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BEER ESCALATOR TAX

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over 46,000 Canadians signed a Beer Canada petition to remove the government's automatic escalator tax on beer. The Canadian beer industry supports 149,000 middle-class jobs, generates \$5.7 billion in tax, and adds \$13.6 billion to Canada's GDP.

In a letter to the industry, the government calls this yearly escalator tax an inconsequential tax increase. Already, 47% of the price of beer in Canada is tax. Meanwhile, the United States federal government lowered its federal excise duty rates on beer, wine, and spirits as of April 1. The top federal excise duty rate on Canadian beer will be 90% higher than the top U.S. rate. Beer drinkers in Canada pay close to \$20 a case in tax, while in the United States, beer drinkers pay about \$2 in tax.

To suggest that there is room to increase the Canadian beer tax rate even further is just not credible. When will the government stop adding tax increases on top of tax increases?

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WOMEN IN HOUSE

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as an alumni of the University of Toronto, it gives me enormous pleasure today to represent the non-partisan group, Women in House, who are taking part today in following our female MPs to address a very serious problem in this place, and that is the under-representation of women in this chamber.

These individuals are going to have the opportunity to shadow different members of Parliament to learn about Ottawa, what a great place it is to work, and how they can serve Canadians by dealing with issues like gender equality. They will engage in mentoring and networking. Hopefully, some of them will return here as leaders.

I want to particularly thank both Tina Park and the member for Toronto—St. Paul's, who are responsible for creating this important initiative to make sure we advance the important cause of having more women in the House.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today President Trump announced new tariffs, both on steel and aluminum. Canada is the number one supplier of aluminum and steel to the United States.

Can the Prime Minister update the House on whether or not he has confirmed with the President of the United States that Canada will be exempt from these tariffs?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians would expect, we are following the situation very carefully. Any tariffs or quota that would be imposed on our Canadian steel and aluminum industries would be unacceptable. Any such decision would have an impact on both sides of the border.

Canadians can rest assured that we will always be there to defend our workers in our steel and aluminum industries across this country. We will stand firm for Canadian workers.

* * *

● (1420)

PRIME MINISTER'S TRIP TO INDIA

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the national security adviser, in briefing the Canadian press on a trip to India, indicated that the Indian government sabotaged the Prime Minister's trip.

When the Prime Minister defended this official in this House, he actually elevated that defence into an official statement of Canada. The Indian government has responded aggressively, saying that it is baseless and it is also unacceptable. This has been characterized as a serious rift in the relationship between Canada and India.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to fix this diplomatic rift?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have been saying, this invitation should never have been sent. As soon as it came to our attention, it was withdrawn, and the MP in question has taken responsibility.

Canada's national security agencies are non-partisan, and both highly competent and effective. We trust them to protect and promote Canada's security. They continue to do an excellent job in serving and protecting the interests of Canadians.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the response from the member, the reality is that we are far beyond invitations to any attempted murderers. Where we are right now is the reality that the Prime Minister is avoiding his responsibility, and as a result we are being laughed at, as a country, across the world.

Oral Questions

The former high commissioner of India to Canada likened the allegations by the Prime Minister of a sabotage conspiracy to something out of *Harry Potter*, calling it pure fiction. A foreign affairs expert on CBC said that the saga is a whodunit, *Harry Potter*, *Alice in Wonderland* scheme.

This is a complete embarrassment. What is the Prime Minister doing to fix the mess he created?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will always promote and defend the integrity of our public servants who accomplish incredible work.

Unlike the previous government, we respect the non-partisan nature of the public service, especially those who serve in national security agencies. We trust that advice and the actions they take. All Canadians can be proud of their non-partisan work, which our national security agencies carry out on a daily basis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one is talking about our public service, and no one is disparaging the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

What we are talking about is the Prime Minister's senior adviser, a person who works very closely with him as part of his duties.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister told the House that the presence of the terrorist Jaspal Atwal at events attended by the Canadian delegation in India was part of a conspiracy by members of the Indian government to sabotage his visit to India.

My question is simple. Does the Prime Minister still believe in this conspiracy theory? If so, all he has to do is table the evidence in the House.

[*English*]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have been saying, this invitation should never have been sent. As soon as it came to our attention, it was withdrawn, and the MP in question has taken responsibility.

Canada's national security agencies are non-partisan, and both highly competent and effective. We trust them to protect and promote Canada's security. They continue to do an excellent job in serving and protecting the interests of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what India's Minister of External Affairs said:

Let me categorically state that the Government of India, including the security agencies, had nothing to do with the presence of Jaspal Atwal [in India]. Any suggestion to the contrary is baseless and unacceptable.

What a strongly-worded and extremely serious statement. Does the Prime Minister agree with it? If not, what has he done to prove otherwise?

[*English*]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said, whether in this case or in their everyday work, all the non-

partisan security agencies do an exceptional job in the service of Canada's national interest.

Canadians can be reassured that, beyond the partisan nature of the comments, the advice offered by these agencies is in no way contingent upon the ruling party. We respect our national security organizations and their public service, and Canada can be proud of all they do in the interest of Canadians.

* * *

● (1425)

HEALTH

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are confused with the Liberals' promise around pharmacare. Not only is it unclear whether the Liberals will eventually, maybe one day, sometime in the future, go ahead with a universal pharmacare program, but even more troubling is that just one day after this big announcement, Canadians learned that the dice are already stacked. The Liberals plan to go forward with a means-tested system.

Why is the government putting together this advisory council if it already knows what it wants to do?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were very pleased to put forward a committee to take a look at how we can ensure that we deal with getting pharmaceutical products to all Canadians. We are going to look for expert advice to tell us how best to do this.

We know that the goal of making sure every Canadian has access to pharmaceuticals is critically important. We also know that listening to experts is important, and that is exactly what we intend to do as we hear back from the advisory committee on how we can move forward.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what déjà vu. I clearly remember the promise around electoral reform.

[*Translation*]

Three major organizations, including the Canadian Labour Congress, have asked that the minister recuse himself from discussions on the pharmacare program, not only to avoid another conflict of interest, but also to keep him from working against Canadians' interests by trying to influence the results of the consultation. Canadians need universal pharmacare now.

Will the Prime Minister remove the Minister of Finance from the discussions, and can he assure us that the consultation is not just a stalling tactic?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud to be looking into exactly what we need to do to make sure every Canadian gets the medication they need. We have decided to put forward an advisory committee to determine how we should proceed. This is very important for our government. We are going to listen to the experts.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another day, another conflict of interest. Once again, Morneau Shepell is involved. It is clear that they never intended to steal the NDP's idea for a comprehensive national pharmacare program. Instead, the Liberals want to sabotage this idea. Stealing our ideas would help people, but sabotaging our ideas never helps anyone.

Why do the interests of Canadian families always come second to the interests of Morneau Shepell and the mega-wealthy?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a bizarre question. We think that the idea of actually having experts help us to come forward with a way that we can get pharmaceuticals to all Canadians is important.

I guess members opposite would have us not have experts involved. I can tell members what would happen if that were the case. We could have the NDP and the member for Carleton do the policy, because that way we would have no expertise at all.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are also not going to wait another 21 years because of Liberal waiting.

Liberals promised yet another study one day and then literally the next day admitted that they have no intention of ever bringing in universal pharmacare. The PBO says that Canadians would save over \$4 billion per year. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians who cannot afford medication would be helped, and businesses would be helped by reducing costs. The only one not helped is Morneau Shepell. We need to act.

The Prime Minister has not stolen the NDP plan; he has vandalized it. Why will the government not bring in real universal pharmacare now?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of our publicly funded universal medicare system, one based on the individual's need and not the ability to pay, yet we recognize that there is certainly room for improvement.

We have created a national advisory committee on the implementation of pharmacare with its mandate to study, evaluate, and ultimately bring recommendations to government on possible options. This initiative will build on the good work that has already been started by the HESA committee. We look forward to the report that we will be receiving next spring.

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PRIME MINISTER'S TRIP TO INDIA

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member of Parliament for Surrey Centre is no longer the B.C. caucus chair. Whether he was fired or resigned is only known between the Prime Minister and him, but what Canadians do know is that a Liberal MP has acknowledged to be the person who invited a convicted terrorist to the Prime Minister's Indian event.

Why is the Prime Minister clinging to this preposterous theory that it was the Indian government? Why is the Liberal government

levying unfounded attacks on our friends in India when one of its own caucus members has accepted responsibility?

● (1430)

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have been saying all along, this invitation should never have been sent. Once we were made aware of this individual's background, the invitation was rescinded. The member has apologized.

We respect tremendously the non-partisan incredible work that the men and women do in our national security agencies every single day. We take their advice, and we act on it accordingly.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we do know is that member, in 2010, said it was unfair for a cloud of suspicion to hang over a community. The Liberals are allowing a cloud of suspicion to hang over a country of over a billion people.

We know the Indian government has said the conspiracy theory claims of the Prime Minister are baseless. The Liberal MP for Surrey Centre has said the Indian conspiracy claims are not correct. Even the Prime Minister's friend, Jaspal Atwal, has called the Indian conspiracy claims a lie.

To stop the diplomatic bleeding, will the Prime Minister retract his remarks?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been pre-eminently clear in our trust for our non-partisan public service. We stand behind them, full force.

I do remember, in 2010, if the member wants to talk about that date, watching the cuts that happened to our security and intelligence infrastructure of hundreds of millions of dollars. I do remember, in 2006, Justice O'Connor's inquiry was ignored. I remember Iacobucci in 2008 was ignored. Important flaws in our security infrastructure that were not fixed. We are fixing it.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answers are always the same. They are devoid of meaning. Let us take it slow.

First, the Prime Minister believes that the Indian government plotted to undermine Canada-India relations. Second, he felt the need to punish one of his MPs for having invited terrorist Jaspal Atwal to the event organized by Canada's high commission in India.

Does this mean that the member and the government are plotting to undermine Canada?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the same questions get the same answers. We have full confidence in the public service and in the work our public servants do every day. This is what the Prime Minister said, and this is still my answer.

Oral Questions

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I understand correctly, the parliamentary secretary is saying that India manipulated the situation in order to create problems between Canada and India. This is what he is saying. If that is the case, he should submit some evidence, because India is saying the opposite.

Does my colleague have any evidence to confirm that India actually did something to undermine Canada?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I totally reject the assertions made by the member opposite. The invitation was sent, and when we received information that there was a problem, the invitation was immediately rescinded. We have full confidence in the public service.

[English]

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know two things. First, the Prime Minister believes the Indian government is responsible for a convicted terrorist embarrassing him on his trip. Second, the Liberal MP has been punished for inviting the convicted terrorist on the trip.

For the Prime Minister, how can these two things both be true? When will the Prime Minister stop hiding the facts, and show us the evidence?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know three things. First, when the individual in question was found out, and the information was there, the invitation was rescinded, and the member of Parliament apologized. Second, I know that this party always, in every way, makes sure that we respect our non-partisan, independent, phenomenal individuals who work within our public service. Third, I know the party opposite, the Conservatives when they were in power, did not.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want answers, because the Liberals are just making no sense.

Why did the Surrey Centre MP apologize and resign his position as B.C. Liberal caucus chair, independently or otherwise, for something the Prime Minister himself said he believed the Indian government did?

This is all as ridiculous, damaging, and disastrous as the trip was itself, and these Liberals should be ashamed.

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have answered the question very clearly. Once we found out that information, the individual's invitation was rescinded, and the member apologized, but I reject totally the assertion that was made about the trip.

More than \$1 billion was achieved in cross-border trade, more than 580,000 good middle-class jobs were created for Canadians, and important frameworks were established to continue our trade with India. It was important work we are going to continue to build on.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister spends a week in another country, people expect him to come back with a lot of good things to show for it, ideally.

He has been back for almost a week now, and we still do not know what the purpose of the trip was. We need leaders who are 100% focused on Canadians' needs, not on themselves or on their party's interests.

When will we find out the true purpose of the trip?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

The Prime Minister of Canada's trip was about strengthening Canada's cultural and economic ties. We announced over \$1 billion in bilateral investment. Thousands of jobs will be created in Canada.

This was a follow-up to last November's trade mission. Prime Ministers are expected to bring home concrete results for workers and the economy. That is exactly what the Prime Minister did.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning I wrote the Prime Minister asking him to provide parliamentarians with a security briefing over his allegations about the alleged interference by the government of India, and how alleged convicted assassin and Liberal insider Jaspal Atwal was given access to the Prime Minister's delegation. Those allegations made in Parliament did enormous damage to Canada's credibility and to the Prime Minister's credibility.

Will the Prime Minister provide Parliament with the evidence in a briefing, or is this him using the Donald Trump damage control playbook of self-serving political Pinocchio-ism?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, and I will reiterate, the invitation sent was rescinded when the information found that the individual should never have received that invitation. The member in question has apologized, and we have full and total confidence in our national security infrastructure and the non-partisan advice they give us. That is advice we take very seriously and listen to in all instances.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, agriculture, agriculture, agriculture, agriculture. In just a few seconds, I have spoken more about agriculture than the Minister of Finance in his 40-minute speech on Tuesday.

There is not a thing for dairy, egg, and poultry producers. There is no mention of managing the transportation crisis in western Canada. There is nothing on risk management. There was no mention of agriculture. The Minister of Agriculture was once again unable to rise and speak about agriculture.

Why is the Liberal government ignoring farmers?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget builds on budget 2017 that identifies agriculture as a key sector. We invested \$150 million in the protein supercluster. We invested \$100 million in agricultural science after millions were cut from the budget by the previous government. We invested \$75 million to promote Canada's trade with China.

We invested \$350 million to make sure our dairy industry remains stable, and to make sure it stays on the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Prince Albert.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for farmers timing is everything. There is a specific time to plant, to spray, to harvest, and in most cases, winter is the time to deliver, when the roads are frozen, so they can carry the weight. In the next few weeks, road bans will go in effect, making it impossible for farmers to move their crop from farm to elevator. The clock is ticking. Farmers are in a cash flow crisis, and time is of the essence.

When will the minister order the railways to do their job, and deliver this year's crop?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know this is a serious situation. That is why we introduced Bill C-49 to establish a strong, reliable, and efficient grain transportation system for the long-term.

The Minister of Transport and I have contacted CN to indicate how serious it is, and that it needs to move grain faster. I have spoken to grain farmers, and indicated to them that we are fully aware of the seriousness of the situation.

• (1440)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals ignored our advice to pass a separate grain transportation bill. When they failed to extend an important provision like interswitching, the Liberals allowed for this grain backlog crisis. We have seen the worst railcar performances of the year, and the numbers are only getting worse.

Yet, the Minister of Agriculture had the nerve yesterday to tell farmers that when it came to the backlog situation, "It's not real serious at this moment." When will the Minister of Agriculture understand how serious this is, and start taking some action?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has proven time and time again that it is strongly committed to Canadian farmers and to the agriculture industry. Unlike the previous Harper government's band-aid solution with an expiry date, this government put forward a permanent and sustainable solution in Bill C-49 that would meet the long-term needs of farmers.

Oral Questions

The Western Grain Elevator Association said, "...this bill is a significant improvement over the existing legislation and is a positive step forward for the grain industry."

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have to stop blaming others for their mismanagement on the grain backlog issue. They can take definitive action now to address the situation but they refuse. The ones suffering the consequences are Canadian grain farmers. In some areas, railcar performance was 6% last week, and it is only getting worse. Our reputation as a reliable grain exporter is tarnished, and yet the Minister of Agriculture cannot even stand up and defend Canadian farmers.

How bad does this situation have to get before the Liberals stop defending the rail monopoly and start fighting for Canadian farmers?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both ministers are very well aware of the situation. In fact, both ministers had conversations with CN and CP about this issue. They have asked them for a plan. They need to see improvement on this issue. If there is no improvement, the ministers are willing to intervene. We are going to give the companies the first chance to improve this process.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Do something now.

The Speaker: I have to thank the hon. member for Foothills for apologizing for his short outburst there.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the Liberals gave us hope that we would finally have a universal pharmacare program. However, 24 hours later, this false hope was shattered by the Minister of Finance, who revealed that coverage would not be universal, public, or free. Studies have made it clear and experts have already spoken about this. Establishing a national pharmacare plan would reduce inequality and ensure that Quebeckers do not have to pay for private insurance which is sometimes beyond their means.

Why are the Liberals not taking action right now?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of their universal health plan, which is publicly funded and based on need, not the ability to pay. However, this plan could be improved.

Oral Questions

We have created an advisory council on the implementation of national pharmacare. This committee is mandated to study and evaluate the options and to make recommendations to the government. It will continue the great work that the health committee started. We look forward to receiving its recommendations.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, “Many Canadians have limited prescription drug coverage, and 12% have no coverage at all. This situation is plainly inconsistent with the values upon which medicare is based. It is illogical to guarantee access to medical diagnosis, but not the treatment, nor does it make economic sense. Together with key partners, a new Liberal government will develop a national plan and timetable for introducing universal public coverage.”

What am I quoting? It is from the 1997 Liberal platform. Liberals failed Canadians then. Why should we believe them now?

The Speaker: The member for Vancouver Kingsway is of course an experienced member and knows that he is not allowed to use props in this place.

The hon. Minister of Health.

•(1445)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise to hear the NDP try to implement an idea without a plan. We are moving forward with a plan. We have created a national advisory council on the implementation of a national pharmacare program. Its mandate is to study, to evaluate, and to bring recommendations to our government. I say “recommendations”, because we want to get this right. This initiative is going to build on the good work the health committee has done in the House. I am looking forward to hearing its recommendations in the spring of 2019.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next week, on International Women's Day, we will be reminded of the important role that women play in shaping our communities, both here in Canada and around the world. Although we have seen significant progress, there is still progress to be made in ensuring real gender equality.

As we approach International Women's Day, could the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Status of Women please tell the House how budget 2018 will contribute to helping close the gaps and ensuring women have real equal opportunities to succeed?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we get set to celebrate the contributions and achievements of women on International Women's Day, I am pleased to say that our government is taking concrete actions toward gender equality by putting gender at the heart of decision-making by legislating gender-based analysis plus, recognizing the important role of Status of Women Canada by making it a full department, and investing \$100 million for a strong, sustainable women's movement. When women succeed, we all succeed, and our economy succeeds.

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, never has a government spent so much and achieved so little. That is the Liberal government's record, with the budget it presented this week. The worst part of the whole thing is that the deficit is \$18 billion, three times more than they promised.

We are not the only ones worried about this situation. The Liberal Premier of Quebec even said that in a period of economic growth, budgets should be balanced.

With all due respect, here is my question for the Minister of Finance: since he claims to be so good at math, could he give us a number? When will we return to a balanced budget?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my advice to the member is that he go back to his riding and really look at what we have achieved. We have the highest growth rate in the G7. We have created 600,000 new jobs in the past two years. That is what we have achieved. Canadian families are in a very good situation.

We decided to invest in Canadians, and we have achieved real results for people across the country. That is the right way to manage an economy.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is welcome to come visit the riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent whenever he wants. I would be only too delighted. The problem is that that was not my question. My question is very simple: when will we return to a balanced budget?

Anyone who knows about economics knows that it makes no sense to run deficits when the economy is doing well. To wit, Sylvain Gilbert, a partner in the firm Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton, said that the Minister of Finance needs to pray that the Canadian economy stays healthy and that continuing to run deficits when the economy is doing well is a very dangerous game.

I will ask my very simple question once again: when will we return to a balanced budget?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two years ago, there was a debate in this country: should we choose budget cuts and austerity, or should we make investments for Canadians? Canadians chose the right way to improve the economy and improve their lives. That is why we have been investing in our country and our families.

Where are we now? Our economic growth rate is very high, and the debt-to-GDP ratio is falling every year. This is a great situation for Canadians.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, talk is cheap, except when the current finance minister does it. Then it is very expensive. He said the deficit would be just \$6 billion this year. Instead, it is \$18 billion. He said it would be balanced next year. Now that will not happen for another quarter-century.

In fact, while he was delivering his budget speech, the national debt grew by \$1.5 billion. That is either too much spending or too much talking. Which is it?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we had a debate a couple of years ago in the country. We had to decide between cuts and austerity, or investments in Canadians. Let us consider the results. We have had the fastest growth in the G7 and the lowest unemployment in about 40 years.

Therefore, in the face of these facts, this is incredible to me. It is only the Conservatives that would consider, with sheer incompetence, to go back to the Harper Conservative approach of austerity and cuts. We are making a difference for Canadians, growing the economy and getting them jobs.

• (1450)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister is like the rooster who thinks he made the sun come up just because he crowed when the sun came up.

In fact, he inherited temporary good fortune from oil prices that are up by 100%, a housing bubble in both Vancouver and Toronto, and massive household indebtedness, which has put our economy on a short-term sugar high. Why has the finance minister spent the cupboard bare in the short-term good times, leaving us so exposed to danger in the long-term future?

The Speaker: I think colleagues would know that it is probably best for order in this place if they do not compare members to barnyard animals.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hate to let facts get in the way of rhetoric, but perhaps we can consider what actually was the inheritance this government took from the previous government. It was unemployment rates at over 7%, and a situation where we had seen the lowest growth rate since the Great Depression.

What has happened since then? With our approach of investing in Canada, we have the highest growth rate in the G7. We have the lowest unemployment rates we have seen in 40 years. Where are we now? We have a fiscally responsible approach to keep investing in the long term in the country, so this generation, the next generation, and future generations will be better off.

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister was travelling around the world with his chef in tow, the reality is that more and more Canadians are being left behind. People in Churchill are facing skyrocketing food prices. They are going hungry because of the policies and

incompetence of the government that has led to the loss of the rail service.

When will the Prime Minister recognize that his globetrotting selfies and his photo-op tours are doing nothing to help Canadians? When will he get to work to act on the real challenges that people in Churchill and across the country are facing today?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to the people of Churchill and northern Manitoba. We recognize the importance of that rail line for that community. We will continue to support the government's negotiator and the ongoing discussions with interested buyers, indigenous groups, and community leaders. We are optimistic we can make progress on this, and we need a sustainable business plan toward owning and operating that line.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Wild Fish Conservancy released lab results showing 100% of escaped salmon tested were infected with the highly contagious virus, PRV. The Liberal rhetoric about strong regulations and environmental protection for salmon mean nothing. The burden of proof that PRV does not cause harm to wild salmon does not rest on the fish. The minister needs to act.

When will the minister get these disease-ridden farms off the wild salmon migration route and on land?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague knows very well that our government is deeply concerned about the state of the wild salmon populations in British Columbia. We have invested literally tens of millions of dollars in enhanced science, monitoring, and auditing processes to ensure the protection of wild Pacific salmon remains a priority for our government. It is something our Pacific caucus has talked to us about over and over again.

We understand that there needs to be robust aquaculture regulations. We understand that conservation protection officers and increased monitoring is important, and we are going to work with the Government of British Columbia to ensure we have the toughest rules in place to protect this industry.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fisheries minister has now had three days to reflect on a question I asked in the House earlier this week. I will ask again, and hope to actually get an answer this time.

When the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans made a decision on the Arctic surf clam quota, a quota that is worth millions of dollars, was he aware that the beneficiary of his decision was the brother of a Liberal caucus colleague member?

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we made a decision to add a new entrant into this important commercial fishery, we knew that the most important people to benefit from this change were indigenous Canadians on the east coast of Canada and in the province of Quebec.

The previous Conservative government had a process to add a new entrant to this fishery. It forgot to include indigenous people. We had an open, competitive process where seven bids were analyzed in detail, and we chose the one that offered the best economic opportunity for indigenous people, Atlantic Canadians, and Quebecers.

• (1455)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister and the Liberal government are completely out of touch with Canadians. By hand-picking winners and losers, the minister is jeopardizing middle-class jobs in Grand Bank and all across Newfoundland and Labrador. The mayor of Grand Bank has called this a devastating blow to his community.

How can the minister justify this to the workers and their families, families whose livelihoods are at stake because of his decision?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand and we respect the concerns of the people of Grand Bank and the people who work in that processing facility. My colleague who represents that community in the House of Commons has spoken to me about this important issue. So has the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are committed to ensuring that the facility in Grand Bank and the workers who earn their living at that important facility have the benefit of an economic opportunity that is sustainable and that is long term. We will continue to ensure that the economic opportunities in Grand Bank remain robust.

However, that party was also planning to bring a new entrant into the fishery, and it did not seem concerned about Grand Bank then.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the chair of the First Nations Financial Management Board said last year that the need for housing and infrastructure is between \$20 billion and \$30 billion. Then he said:

Where is all of that money going to come from...if we don't engage in business and economic development?

The Liberals' response is tanker bans, drilling moratoriums, taxes, and increased red tape. Investment is fleeing and they have impeded the opportunity for investment.

Why are the Liberals putting up so many roadblocks for indigenous economic prosperity?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer this question and to talk about things like the housing investments that were made in our federal budget this week.

We have investments of \$500 million for Métis housing, \$400 million for Inuit housing, and \$200 million every single year for first nations housing. We are working with our partners on developing a distinctions-based housing strategy to make sure that we address these gaps, get jobs for people, and get people homes to live in.

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[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Richard Hébert (Lac-Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since coming to power, our government has made every effort to ensure that economic growth benefits the middle class. Although the majority of Canadians work hard and pay their taxes, we know that some wealthy individuals and businesses use tax strategies to avoid paying their fair share.

Budget 2018 reiterates our government's commitment to fighting tax evasion and avoidance.

Can the Minister of National Revenue inform the House of the new measures that make our tax system fairer?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean for being a strong voice for the regions of Quebec.

In the past two years, we have done quite a lot to fight those who avoid paying their fair share of taxes. In fact, the revised voluntary disclosures program goes into effect today in order to limit the abuse of its use by major accounting firms.

Budget 2018 provides nearly \$100 million in new investments. We also announced that we are closing tax loopholes used by multinationals. The net is tightening.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard is bitterly disappointed in budget 2018. The mayor of Lévis is disappointed as well, because there is nothing in the budget for Davie shipyard workers and subcontractors in Lévis. This is the shipyard that delivered the *Asterix* on time.

When will the Prime Minister keep his word and start converting the four icebreakers, move forward with converting the *Obelix*, and include the Davie shipyard in Canada's national shipbuilding strategy?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for everything he is doing for workers at the Davie shipyard.

Workers at the Davie shipyard did excellent work on the *Asterix*. We have needs beyond the icebreakers. We are working and negotiating with Davie to meet these needs. When we have made a decision, we will share it with everyone.

Oral Questions

● (1500)

TAXATION

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know too many people who got a tax break in Tuesday's budget, except for major web giants such as Netflix—no taxes, a lovely little financial gift paid for by ordinary taxpayers. The government's only response to the Quebec consensus on taxing web giants is to conduct a five-year study and to talk about it with other G7 countries this summer. The government is going to look rather silly because all the other G7 countries are already charging sales tax.

Will the government acknowledge that we must immediately adopt the solution used by almost every OECD country? That takes piecemeal agreements with multi-nationals.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the media sector is facing many upheavals because consumer habits are changing. That is why we have made a commitment to modernize our policies so that they address digital issues. The Prime Minister has been very clear on the tax issue. We made a promise, and we are going to keep it. We acknowledge that over the longer term, we will have to develop a comprehensive solution to the issue of taxing digital platforms, and we are not going to take a piecemeal approach.

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[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indigenous children comprise 7.7% of all Canadians under 15 years of age, yet they represent a whopping 52% of children in foster care in private homes. Indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians alike, including my constituents in St. John's East, are demanding that this ongoing injustice be addressed. Can the hon. Minister of Indigenous Services please update this House on what our government is doing to champion indigenous children's welfare?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for St. John's East for his advocacy on this issue. I hope that all members in this House were heartened to see that there are new investments in the order of \$1.4 billion to support child and family services for indigenous families. This means that we will be able to achieve equity for first nations child and family services agencies. Even more than that, we will be able to support communities with prevention services, ensuring that children can be raised by their families, in their communities, surrounded by their language and culture. I hope we are all working hard to that end.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Oddly, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change shared a video of herself celebrating with the Canada Parks and Wilderness Society, a group that is suing her government. However, when it comes to meeting with organizations that are uniquely positioned to protect caribou in the communities in which they live, the minister suddenly has no time. Can the minister confirm that she

refused to meet with the Northwest Species at Risk Committee and the Alberta Forest Alliance?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my job I am happy to meet with as many people as I can, as do my public servants and as does my political team.

I was very pleased that we announced \$1.3 billion for parks and protected areas in budget 2018. This is amazing for Canadians. This is amazing to tackle climate change. This is amazing for species at risk. It also demonstrates that the environment and the economy go together.

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[Translation]

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's forests are infested with the spruce budworm and it seems like the federal government is doing everything it can to make matters worse. In 2014, the government gave twice as much money to New Brunswick as it did to Quebec to stop the infestation. The problem is that the spruce budworm does not recognize borders. The infested area in Quebec is larger than the entire province of New Brunswick. Our producers fare just as badly in the new budget: the government is giving \$75 million to the Maritimes and not one cent to Quebec, not one cent.

What exactly is it going to take for Quebec to get its share?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the critical importance of forestry to the economies of eastern and western Canada as a source of jobs, prosperity, and opportunity. We are acutely aware of the threat that forest pests like the mountain pine beetle, emerald ash borer, and spruce budworm pose to Canada's forests. In budget 2016, we invested \$87 million to support scientific research and infrastructure, including funding to combat destructive forest pests such as the spruce budworm and the mountain pine beetle. We are working closely with provinces, universities, and industry, all with the common goal of finding a way to keep these pest populations low—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, obviously, Quebecers are ill-served by this government. Ottawa gave \$225 million to help British Columbia when it had a similar problem in the past. This year, it allocated \$25 million to the Maritimes but is giving Quebec absolutely nothing. Ottawa is doing nothing for forested areas the size of a province that are being ravaged by the infestation. It is doing nothing for forests that are becoming unusable and driving their owners into ruin.

How can this government justify helping the other provinces with Quebecers' money while completely ignoring Quebec?

Speaker's Ruling

●(1505)

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are hardly ignoring the forest industry, including the forest industry in Quebec.

We were very pleased to announce an \$867-million softwood lumber package in response to the unwarranted countervail and anti-dumping duties of the United States. We continue to have very important conversations with the Government of Quebec, with the Minister of Forests in Quebec, working to make sure that our forests are protected not only for today but for tomorrow.

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*[English]***POINTS OF ORDER**

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to apologize to all of my colleagues in the House for holding up a document, the 1997 Liberal platform. That is the wrong way to remind Canadians of the broken promises of the government.

I would like to seek unanimous consent to table the 1997 Liberal election campaign platform, which promised Canadians universal pharmacare.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

*[Translation]***ROYAL ASSENT**

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

March 1st, 2018

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 1st day of March 2018, at 1:06 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Assunta Di Lorenzo

The bills assented to on Thursday, March 1, 2018, are Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act; and Bill C-311, An Act to amend the Holidays Act (Remembrance Day).

* * *

*[English]***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a bit of a different schedule, because we have just been here for one week and then we will be going back to our ridings for another two weeks, which is going to be great. I hope the Prime

Minister stays in his constituency, or at least stays here, so he does not embarrass us anymore or cause any diplomatic incidents.

I am wondering if the government House leader could tell us what we will be doing for the rest of this week and then when we get back in two weeks.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too look forward to having our two weeks in the riding.

I can assure the hon. member and all Canadians that the Prime Minister and this government will always stay focused on the needs of Canadians.

This afternoon, we will continue to debate the Conservative opposition day motion. Tomorrow the House will debate Bill C-69, the environmental assessment legislation, at second reading.

[Translation]

When we return after two weeks in our ridings, we will have the last three days of budget debate on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-69—PROPOSAL TO APPLY STANDING ORDER 69.1—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on February 27, 2018, by the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé concerning the second reading of Bill C-69, an act to enact the impact assessment act and the Canadian energy regulator act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, under the provisions of Standing Order 69.1.

I would like to thank the hon. member for having raised this question, as well as the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his intervention on this point.

●(1510)

[English]

The hon. member argued that Bill C-69 is an omnibus bill, as she feels it contains several different initiatives which should be voted on separately. She noted that the bill would delete two existing acts, would enact new ones, and would amend over 30 other acts. The hon. member requested that the Chair divide the question at second reading to allow for a vote on each of the three main parts of the bill.

Part 1 would enact the impact assessment act and repeal the existing Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

Part 2 would enact the Canadian energy regulator act as well as repeal the National Energy Board Act. The hon. member argued that this second part deals more with natural resources than with the environment and should therefore be voted upon separately.

Speaker's Ruling

Part 3 consists of amendments to the Navigation Protection Act, which would be renamed the Canadian navigable waters act. As this deals with matters relating to transportation, she felt that this part should also be subject to a separate vote.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member helpfully identified which of the consequential and coordinating provisions, contained in part 4, she believed were associated with each of the other parts. I am grateful for her specificity in this regard. I would note that these consequential and coordinating amendments represent the changes to the 30 other acts referenced by the hon. member. In the vast majority of cases, the changes are to reflect updated terminology relating to the names of new agencies or statutes created by the bill. The fact that there is a large number of them is not a significant factor in determining whether or not this constitutes an omnibus bill.

[*English*]

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader agreed that the bill amends several acts, but argued that there is in fact a common element to link together all of the changes. He stated that the bill represents a comprehensive review of federal environmental and regulatory processes and that to consider them separately would create unnecessary uncertainty about the overall framework.

As members will recall, Standing Order 69.1 took effect last September. It gives the Speaker the power to divide the question on the second or third reading of a bill where “there is not a common element connecting the various provisions or where unrelated matters are linked”. The critical question for the Chair, then, is to determine to what extent the various elements of the bill are linked.

[*Translation*]

To date, I have been asked to apply this standing order on two instances. On November 7, 2017, I declined to allow multiple votes in relation to Bill C-56, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Abolition of Early Parole Act, as I felt the two issues raised by the bill were sufficiently related and that they were essentially provided for under the same act. On November 8, I agreed to apply the standing order in relation to Bill C-63, the Budget Implementation Act, 2017, No. 2, as I considered that there were several issues contained in the bill that were not announced in the budget presentation. On November 20, in relation to Bill C-59, the national security act, 2017, I ruled that the standing order could not apply to a motion to refer a bill to committee before second reading, though I invited members to raise the issue again prior to third reading of the bill if necessary.

I would underscore, as I did in my ruling on Bill C-63, that the Chair does not have the power to divide a bill into different pieces of legislation to be considered separately. The Standing Order only allows me to divide the question on the motions for second and third reading for the purposes of voting.

● (1515)

[*English*]

Bill C-69 does clearly contain several different initiatives. It establishes two new agencies, the impact assessment agency and the Canadian energy regulator, and makes a series of amendments to the

Navigation Protection Act. One could make the case, as did the parliamentary secretary, that there is indeed a common thread connecting these various initiatives, in that they are all related to environmental protection. However, the question the Chair must ask itself is whether the purpose of the standing order was to deal only with matters that were obviously unrelated or whether it was to provide members with the opportunity to pronounce themselves on specific initiatives when a bill contains a variety of different measures.

[*Translation*]

In presenting arguments relating to Bill C-63, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard raised an interesting concept from the practice in the Quebec National Assembly. Quoting from page 400 of *Parliamentary Procedure in Québec*, he stated:

The principle or principles contained in a bill must not be confused with the field it concerns. To frame the concept of principle in that way would prevent the division of most bills, because they apply to a specific field.

While their procedure for dividing bills is quite different from ours, the idea of distinguishing the principles of a bill from its field has stayed with me. While each bill is different and so too each case, I believe that Standing Order 69.1 can indeed be applied to a bill where all of the initiatives relate to a specific policy area, if those initiatives are sufficiently distinct to warrant a separate decision of the House.

[*English*]

In this particular instance, I have no trouble agreeing that all of the measures contained in Bill C-69 relate to environmental protection. However, I believe there are distinct initiatives that are sufficiently unrelated that they warrant multiple votes. Therefore, I am prepared to allow more than one vote on the motion for second reading of the bill.

As each of the first two parts of the bill does indeed enact a new act, I can see why the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé would like to see each one voted separately. However, my reading of the bill is that the regimes set out in part 1, the impact assessment act, and part 2, the Canadian energy regulator act, are linked in significant ways, reflected in the number of cross-references. For example, the impact assessment act provides for a process for assessing the impact of certain projects, but contains specific provisions for projects with activities regulated under the Canadian energy regulator act. There are also obligations in the Canadian energy regulator act that are subject to provisions in the impact assessment act. Given the multiple references in each of these parts to the entities and processes established by the other part, I believe it is in keeping with the standing order that these two parts be voted together.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

With respect to part 3, which amends the Navigation Protection Act, I find that it is sufficiently distinct and should be subject to a separate vote. While there are some references in part 2 to changes made in part 3, I do not believe they are so deeply intertwined as to require them to be considered together. There would be an opportunity to correct these references as part of the amending process if part 3 should not be adopted by the House.

As I stated earlier, part 4 of the bill is made up of consequential and coordinating amendments arising out of the other 3 parts. In my ruling on Bill C-56, I recognized that the analysis and division of a bill into different parts can sometimes be quite complex. Based on my reading of part 4, which differs slightly from that of the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé, clauses 85, 186, 187, and 195 seem to be related to part 3 and will be voted with that part. The remaining clauses in part 4, with the exception of the coming into force clause, specifically 196, appear to relate only to parts 1 and 2 and will therefore be grouped with those parts. The schedule relates only to part 1 and will also be grouped with it.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1520)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a unique relationship with the Canada summer jobs program. In fact, it is probably a relationship that most other MPs have. I have a great attachment to it.

When I first started to work at the Dairy Queen in Sidney, Nova Scotia, it was because of the fact that the company received a grant, as we used to call it. That allowed for some of the pay of the employee to be covered by the government. That got me started in the workforce. Ironically, 10 years later, when I went back to Sidney, after doing my first year of law in Osgoode University, I ended up, again, having my first law job come from the fact that it was a Canada summer job grant.

I have always been appreciative of it, because I know how important it is for those who are looking for jobs in the summer, especially in areas like Cape Breton, which is severely unemployed. As a result, I have a great affection for the program and I am always very concerned about it.

I also know these jobs and this program are incredibly important from the point of view as an employer. Employers get to have students come in and they have the ability to train new workers. They get to expand their business during the time they are having that little help with respect to what they pay somebody. Of course, it is incredibly important for not-for-profits to ensure they can cover off their duties and responsibilities.

As an MP, I got to see just how important the program is to our communities.

I reflected upon a number of the places that had received Canada summer jobs help and aid in the past, such as the Royal City Soccer Club, the Milton Youth Soccer Club, the YMCA, the John Howard Society of Peel, Halton and Dufferin, the Community Foundation of Halton North, Conservation Halton, the United Way Milton, and the Milton Chamber of Commerce. The list continues of companies and not-for-profits that are made up of good people, good work, and solid community builders.

Therefore, I have been watching this issue of an attestation associated with the summer jobs program with great interest. I have read much about the issue. From what I can understand, in November 2017 the government was obliged to settle a lawsuit with three groups that were turned down summer job programs in the summer of 2017. They applied to the court saying that they did not know that one of the criteria upon which they were denied was the criterion they would have to attain. In fact, the court found that the criterion on which the denial was given was not listed in the application guide. We can assume it was this decision and this payout that caused the government to decide the attestation would be attached to the Canada summer jobs program.

This is where I have great concern. It seems to me that this attestation was very arbitrary, incredibly unprecedented, and also quite odd. Therefore, I thought there must be something else in government legislation that could explain or maybe have something to do with the attestation.

I went back and looked at my list. I decided to look at the places where I thought the individuals in charge would have a very difficult time ticking off the attestation box. As I went through the list and looked at these, I realized that a lot of them were churches and registered charitable organizations, like St. George and St. Abanoub Coptic Orthodox Church, True North Church, the Milton Bible Church, Tansley United Church, and the Milton Christian School.

Then I got to thinking a little about charitable organizations in general, and I did a bit of digging. What I found extremely interesting was that there were general requirements for charitable registration. In fact, it is an incredibly complex and very difficult process for an entity to go through. There are many hoops. The application form is at least 15 pages long. The information that is gathered is deep and goes to the very core of what the organization is. All of this is reviewed by the Canada Revenue Agency, and a decision is given.

● (1525)

If a decision is given that an entity will not receive charitable registration status, it then has the ability to appeal this decision. It is treated in such a way that it knows how important it is.

Business of Supply

As I went through the requirements, I found it very interesting that the CRA officials would look at the charitable purposes and activities, at the public benefit for charities, at political activities of charities, at business activities, at operating through intermediaries, and also wanted to ensure that purposes and activities that were illegal in Canada or contrary to Canadian public policy were prohibited. They are very specific on that. They say that entities are not eligible for charitable status if they are taking activities that are contrary to Canadian public policy.

I went back to the list and looked again to see what kinds of entities there were. They have gone through many different iterations, obviously, of ensuring they would receive charitable status. I began to wonder why this attestation would be baffling to me and I came up with two reasons.

One, if the reason that the attestation is attached to the Canada summer jobs program, because officials want to ensure companies are adhering to Canadian public policy, why not have a more robust system rather than self-regulating tick off a box? They already do that with the CRA. It has been deemed already that in order to ensure an entity is inside with public policy to receive breaks from the Canadian government, it would have to go through an in-depth review of its activities and have a third party determine whether it was in adherence of Canadian public policy.

The second thing that crossed my mind was this. If these entities have already passed this incredibly in-depth process and after writing everything they do as a charity and talking about public policy, and it has been determined that they are to be charitable organizations, why is that not enough for the Government of Canada to determine that they are in compliance with Canadian public policy? If a charity is registered, it has passed stringent tests and should be deemed to not be contrary to Canadian public policy. It is a very simple tick it can put on the Canada summer jobs program that accomplishes what the officials are seeking and at the same time alleviates the concerns that had been read into the House record today.

Then I thought, maybe this attestation was not really about Canadian public policy. Maybe this is about creating a new definition of Canadian public policy and a new determination of what it represents, which has been ripped from the Liberal platform. I wondered whether this now would be determinative for charitable status.

There is a registry on the Canada Revenue Agency. If we type in the search term “church”, there are 15,210 churches alone in Canada. That is just churches. Many others on the list that would not willingly want to sign or tick off the attestation that would also be on that list.

The hon. member across the way just laughed when I indicated my concern was that the CRA would approach applying a more stringent public policy test to charitable organizations. He would be remiss to not remember that the CRA, in past experience, did make decisions without consulting ministers on the disability tax credit and also on the decision to ensure that taxes were taken from those who received any kind of compensation through breaks or discounts while they were on the job.

We can absolutely have the problem where officials of the CRA take it upon themselves to determine that the new definition of Canadian public policy for the purposes of charitable organizations is the one that the government has slammed into the Canada summer jobs attestation. That is not good public policy. That is not the way this public policy should happen in our country. As a result, I am more than happy to stand here today and say that the attestation is ridiculous and offensive. If the Liberals want to change Canadian public policy, do it in an honourable way.

● (1530)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share an experience. I worked as a high school chaplain for 20 years. There was more than one occasion when I went to school that there was a group of demonstrators outside the school holding pictures of aborted fetuses. As students went into the school, they had to look at those pictures. They had no choice. As a chaplain in the school, I then had a number of those students come to me. They were devastated at what they saw.

I go back to this. The attestation is not about values and beliefs. I am a big believer in charitable work. The attestation is about activities. Our government is trying to get at the activity I just mentioned. Does the hon. member believe activities of holding pictures of aborted fetuses for young girls to see as they enter their high schools is an activity a government should fund?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, in her intervention and question, the hon. member has admitted to the House that it is the policy of the government to change what will be Canadian public policy and determining that the attestation more fits with what should be looked at as opposed to what is currently being looked at CRA. The reason is that one of the things a charity has to do is describe all the activities it undertakes. This activity would be described in an application for charitable status.

Is she now telling me that because of the stories she told, charities will have their charitable status taken away from them? Is that where we are going in this situation?

● (1535)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague, for whom I have enormous respect. However, I feel she took a turn in the road, going at the CRA. We know the previous government used the CRA to go after environmental groups. The question before us today is whether organizations that work with young people should get funding.

There were groups in my riding of Timmins—James Bay that abused it. A group called Priests for Life, which I have never heard of and has no connection in my riding, was using it strictly for militant work on abortion. To me, that is a fairly straightforward mechanism to ensure groups like that, which are not doing youth outreach, do not get the funding.

Business of Supply

What concerns me is it seems we are going into a Liberal culture war here. Many groups do faith work and incredible work with community groups. They now feel they are under this attestation. I am trying to reassure people in my riding that if they are doing good community work, they are still eligible. However, I am very concerned that this ham-fisted response to what was a reasonable problem that could have easily been fixed would not have resulted in the kinds of concerns I hear across our region.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, it is a fair comment. I appreciate the intervention from the hon. member, who I like very much as well, being the fact that we share roots from Cape Breton.

The ham-fisted way in which the government has shoved this attestation in haste to deal with the problem it botched the first time will set up a situation where we will have a lot more worried organizations. I do not think they understand and realize that there is already a Canadian public policy test sprinkled throughout legislation in the government. One of the more serious areas is in the Canadian registry for charitable organizations.

There can be many challenges others will launch, and letters that will be written to the CRA, trying to take away charitable status for many organizations across the country on the basis that the government has changed the attestation to be so specific, that it is deeming it is no longer within Canadian public policy. This is a mess, and we have to absolutely oppose it.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would have been far more democratic and accountable for the government simply to say to its members of Parliament that if they did not like a particular funding of an organization, they should deep-six it, then stand before their constituents and be individually responsible. The Liberals keep talking about actions versus beliefs. If one reads the attestation, it says that one signs up with what the government believes to be the values of our country. That is Orwellian.

The member has referred to the CRA. The Prime Minister has mentioned that this kind of attestation thinking will apply to future youth programming. Is she worried about other programs, besides the CRA or the summer jobs, to which this new attestation Orwellian thought speech will apply?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is talking about is legislative creep, and that is exactly what I am talking about today. I am very worried about the application of this to other aspects of government services.

We saw it already. It happened when the Liberal Party of Canada said that people must sign off on their own attestation on certain topics important to the Liberal Party of Canada, and thou shalt not speak of those things, even though people may believe another way. Now it has found its way into Canada summer jobs. Where is it going to find itself next? The Prime Minister has opened the door, and it is going to be part of other programs.

I am sounding the alarm right now. We could be in for a major problem with charitable status in this country and ripping the carpet out from so many vulnerable people who depend on charities and their good work.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for St. Catharines.

I am very pleased to be speaking today about the Canada summer jobs program and national priorities. As you know, Canada Summer Jobs is a federal program that provides employers with funding to help them create summer jobs for students. A summer job is key for students who want to acquire the type of work experience that employers look for in a curriculum vitae while earning money to pay for their next year in school. The work experience students acquire during the summer is important in the educational process, because it makes it easier for them to enter the workforce once they have finished school.

Society and the job market are in constant evolution. As a government, we must ensure that all young Canadians, including those facing obstacles, can get a good job. We must also make sure that employers have access to workers with the skills they need. This year, we set five national priorities for Canada summer jobs in order to be in a better position to meet current and future workforce needs and improve job prospects for young Canadians.

Employers who support these national priorities have been invited to apply, in particular employers who want to hire young people who belong to an under-represented group; small businesses; organizations that provide employment opportunities for official language minority communities; organizations that offer services to the LGBTQ2+ community or that support it; and, lastly, organizations that hire women, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and information and communication technologies. Incidentally, this year, we extended the application period by one week, until February 9.

I would now like to address the reasons for setting each of these priorities. The first concerns under-represented youth. We are aware that all young people face challenges. However, some groups of young people encounter major obstacles, and a summer job can help. Consider young indigenous people, for example. Unfortunately, all too often these young people are less likely to finish secondary school than non-indigenous youth, which has a major impact on their career prospects.

Let's also consider young recent immigrants. Without work experience in Canada, without a professional network, without proficiency in the official languages, and without recognition of their credentials, they are unlikely to be able to get a job and keep it. The numbers speak for themselves: in 2011, 48.9% of young recent immigrants were employed, compared to 61% of youth born in Canada. It is therefore necessary to help these under-represented young people get the work experience they need.

Business of Supply

Why are official language minority communities a priority? These communities help promote our two official languages across the country through their contribution to Canada's socio-economic fabric. Furthermore, pursuant to part VII of the Official Languages Act, we must take measures to enhance the vitality of these communities and assist their development, as well as to foster Canada's two official languages. By adding official language minority communities to our priorities, we are ensuring their long-term survival and vitality.

I now want to talk about the LGBTQ2 community. Our government recognizes that all Canadians have the right to live without fear of discrimination and to be fully included in all facets of Canadian society, regardless of who they love or how they identify or express their gender. This is why we committed to protecting the dignity, security, and rights of transgender and gender-diverse Canadians. Our government will prioritize the applications from organizations that create job opportunities for young people in this community. We are doing this because we recognize that this community has faced a lot of discrimination in the workplace.

● (1540)

Today, members of the LGBTQ still earn less than their peers. We are taking action to change that.

I would now like to talk about small businesses, which are vital to the growth of the Canadian economy. They represent 97.9% of all businesses in Canada, account for 30% of Canada's GDP on average, and play an important role in job creation.

Small businesses with no more than 50 employees are not always able to pay the full salary for a summer position. By providing financial assistance to hire young people and give them valuable work experience, we are helping these businesses as well as our youth. Young workers benefit from these professional experiences and bring many ideas and new perspectives to their workplace and their local community.

For the second year in a row, jobs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and information and communications technologies are included in the national priorities of the Canada summer jobs program.

We are supporting our government's vision to make Canada a global centre for innovation.

What is different this year is that we have added an additional priority for employers in these fields so that they recruit women.

We are stressing the recruitment of women because even though they have made progress in terms of labour force participation, all too often they continue to be under-represented in STEM professions.

By helping employers create job opportunities in these professions, we are helping students, especially female students, consider a career in professions that are in great demand and that will shape the future of Canada.

These priorities foster economic growth and help our middle class prosper. Young Canadians have many talents, and it is our

responsibility to help them find their place in our society and contribute to our economy.

Our government knows that taxpayers' money should never be used to support organizations that seek to undermine the rights of Canadians.

We know that the opposition leader, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, has a long-standing friendship with the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, an organization that actively opposes the right of women to choose what to do with their own bodies. Nine months ago, during the leadership campaign, he spoke with the centre's communications director, Jonathon Van Maren. Mr. Van Maren said that, like many of us, he knew for a long time who his top choices would be. The member for Regina—Qu'Appelle was pro-life and had the record to prove it.

The opposition leader said that he had always voted in favour of pro-life legislation, that he had always voted according to his conscience, and that he had spoken out against the fact that Henry Morgentaler was awarded the Order of Canada.

The support of the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform was key to the opposition leader's victory in the leadership race. As a result, it is easy to see why the opposition leader has a direct interest in ensuring that the centre continues to use Canadian taxpayers' dollars to promote its anti-abortion agenda.

However, the government side is determined to continue to help our young people continue their education and acquire the experience they need to succeed in life.

● (1545)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that, like me, my colleague has had many people and groups in her riding approach her with concerns about how this attestation is being administered. I have had dozens of community groups in my riding approach me personally, either by email, in person, by phone, or by letter. They are very concerned about these issues. I also conducted a round table, where I had 13 participants who came and expressed some deep concerns.

Earlier in my remarks, I commented about a group in my riding that did not want me to use its name or divulge anything about it, because its members were afraid that because they were objecting to the attestation, they might be punished in future applications for other government programs. People are afraid to sign the letter, because they feel that the federal government will continue to limit freedom of belief and move these requirements into other federal programs. My colleague from Milton outlined that danger very well.

One of the member's colleagues, the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, has come out very clearly in opposition to this attestation. He said that the attestation is “totally flopped” and that the test itself shows “a lack of respect”. We hear a lot about respect when it comes to this attestation. Does my colleague agree with her colleague from Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame?

Business of Supply

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I am pleased to hear that he had the chance to talk with his constituents. I also had the privilege of hosting a roundtable and the questions were very clear. People wanted to know how to access the Canada summer jobs program, how to align with national priorities, and how to ensure that young Canadians gain experience that respects their rights.

There were plenty of questions and conversations. Employers who were interested said that they believed in it and that they would apply for the Canada summer jobs program and demonstrate that they respect Canadians' rights. I have received a number of applications and I look forward to seeing which ones will be accepted.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention by my colleague today. Back in December, when there were some concerns raised, supplemental information was shared.

This is one program that members of Parliament are very much invested in. They have the opportunity to share the priorities of their ridings or areas with the program, and that weighs in on each of the applications. Everyone has a database.

What we did with the supplemental information was get it out to those who had applied in previous years. I think that satisfied the vast majority. Obviously, the number of applications is higher than it was last year, so most groups are comfortable with the additional information.

Would my colleague have undertaken a similar initiative? How did she address it when additional information was requested from the people in her riding who had applied?

[Translation]

Mrs. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

In Ottawa—Vanier it was very interesting to see how many groups, whether non-profit organizations, businesses, or institutions wanted to use this highly sought-after program to encourage young people to work during the summer.

I had the privilege of not only organizing a roundtable, but also sending a wealth of information through letters and on social media. I became very involved with local businesses and organizations to help them prepare and ask questions about their application, and to encourage them to apply.

There was a host of communications exercises, and my team answered the questions to ensure that people could respond properly and complete their application either electronically or on paper.

[English]

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today, and correct the record on many of the inaccuracies being advanced by the opposition benches.

The absurd theory suggested that this is a debate on values or religion is simply ridiculous. This is simply a matter of reading a definition on a publicly available website.

If my colleagues will indulge me, I will take a moment to read the definition of the core mandate into the record:

An organization's mandate is a statement of its main purpose or its reason for existence. The key activities undertaken by the organization, including services provided to the community outline how the mandate is fulfilled. For many not-for-profits and religious organizations, their mandate may be similar to the description of "ongoing programs" that they provide to the Canada Revenue Agency at tax time.

There are many colleagues on the other side who are playing lawyer. They will take a couple of words from the application, and not include the definition. We are legislators. We deal with definitions on defined terms every day, and to ignore the definition is misleading to Canadians, and that is unacceptable. Canadians are not being told the full story of the program, and kids and students are going to suffer.

As one can see, there is absolutely nothing that precludes religious organizations from applying, or even being granted funds under the Canada summer jobs program. I have had the opportunity in St. Catharines to speak to many faith organizations in my community, and I am pleased that they are applying, because there is nothing here that will prevent them from applying or receiving funding. No argument can be made to the contrary.

It is irresponsible for the opposition to advance the position that attesting to upholding charter rights equates to a values test. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is not something to be trivialized. I contend that the charter is Canadian values themselves enshrined in law. Asking Canadians to simply reaffirm that public funds will be used in a way that respects those values and laws our nation is built upon is not much to ask for.

However, what makes me angry is that member after member from the Conservative caucus is standing up or Tweeting misinformation that is leading to organizations losing out on funding. The misinformation that is being promoted is leading these organizations to falsely believe that they are no longer eligible for funding. Every summer camp that kids do not get to attend or meals on wheels program that is short a driver in their ridings is thanks to the opposition and the misinformation that is being spread.

This is being made worse by the fact that they are only doing this to pander to their base. The farther their leader drags them away from the centre requires them to go looking for new votes. The general public, especially young Canadians, should not suffer because the Leader of the Opposition is trolling for votes.

Business of Supply

If we look at the price the Leader of the Opposition had to pay to become the leader of the Conservative Party, we look to statements that have been made by a long-standing relationship with the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, an organization that fights against a woman's right to choose. Nine months ago during his leadership campaign, he spoke to the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform director of communication, Jonathon Van Maren, who said, "Like most of you, I've known who my top choices are for months...[The Leader of the Opposition] is pro-life and has a record to prove it."

That is because the Leader of the Opposition told the centre, "I have always voted in favour of pro-life legislation. I voted according to my conscience every time. I spoke out when Henry Morgentaler received the Order of Canada..."

That is the price that the Leader of the Opposition paid, and this is what we are seeing again today. There has been misinformation, as I have said.

Over the past two years, I have had the pleasure of visiting businesses and organizations in my riding who were recipients of Canada summer jobs funding. I think particularly of visiting two young students at the Foster Festival, which is an arts and theatre festival in St. Catharines. They were theatre students at Brock University who had the opportunity to build sets, meet new people, and have mentors in an industry that can be difficult to get into, especially in Niagara.

● (1555)

They were recipients of Canada summer jobs funding. So too were many faith organizations, and that will happen again. At those businesses and organizations, I had the opportunity to meet with students who were hired, and the message I got from them was identical. They were all pleased to have an opportunity to gain the on-the-job experience that they were receiving, to work hard, and to make a few hard-earned extra dollars to take back to school in the fall.

It is obvious why the tactics of my colleagues across the aisle are so infuriating. These tactics are causing these students to suffer, to lose out on unique opportunities. Has anyone thought of the students and how the misinformation being spread impacts them?

I am grateful to churches, to the mosque in St. Catharines, and to other faith organizations, and organizations that may not be churches themselves but are inspired by faith, inspired by Christianity. I am happy to report they are applying for Canada summer jobs. I look forward to visiting those students this summer so we can see them at work, building that on-the-job experience and making a bit of extra money.

We are talking so much about religious values, yet no one on the opposition has stopped to ask about how this will affect the students.

We are the government that recognized the importance of this program. We doubled the funding for this program because of the positive impact it was having on Canadian youth. The benefits and opportunities afforded to young Canadians demanded that this program be expanded. That is what should be on the minds of our opposition colleagues.

The opposition would rather see these funds used to undermine the hard-earned charter rights of Canadians. That is completely unacceptable. The Conservatives continue to speak about religious rights and freedom of speech, which are not impacted by the attestation, yet they seem to forget about the rights guaranteed to women under section 15. The equality rights guaranteed under section 15 protect the rights of women should they choose to access safe abortion services.

We have already heard one member of the opposition rise today and liken the LGBTQ2 community to a lifestyle choice. We have heard the opposition House leader comparing the government's protection of charter rights in this attestation to the horrible oppression and prosecution of the LGBTQ2 community during the sixties, seventies, and eighties. It is clear that the opposition does not get it, and it is clear that the government needs to stand up for these hard-earned charter rights.

Enough is enough with the misinformation. Enough is enough with the marginalization of charter rights. Enough is enough with the disrespect that has been shown toward young Canadians and organizations in our communities. This is a program about young Canadians getting good-paying summer jobs and life experiences that go along with that. It is time to put them back into the centre of our thinking and not treat them like political pawns.

Every year I look forward to seeing the Canada summer jobs list for my riding, to seeing the positive impact those jobs will have in St. Catharines and on young Canadians. As in past years, I look forward to seeing that list in the near future. I am looking forward to seeing those kids get the skills that they are looking forward to very soon. I am also looking forward to continuing this in the coming years.

● (1600)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for St. Catharines raising his concerns about misinformation. However, it is the Liberal government that proposed these changes. It is the one responsible for the administration of the program. It put out this attestation and gave very little guidance to Canadians. The opposition members ask questions, but we do not get firm answers, especially from the minister responsible. He can understand why some Canadians would be less than certain as to what the government is intending to do.

The government could have just said to their Liberal members of Parliament to reject Canada summer jobs applications that they disagreed with. That is something they could do, and be more directly accountable to constituents. It could have said, "Let's ban political or social advocacy, whether knocking on doors for political or social causes", but it did not do that.

The Prime Minister has said he would like to see this kind of attestation applied to other areas in our system. Does the member opposite believe these kinds of attestations should be used for determining if someone should be able to get a job with the Government of Canada? This is the kind of ideological thinking that has consequences. I would like to hear from the member if he supports that.

Business of Supply

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, the rights within the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are hard-earned, and we have members from the other side getting up in 2018 and still calling the LGBTQ2 community a lifestyle choice. In the eyes of the member who said those words, it would be fine to discriminate. It would be fine to use public money for that particular purpose. That is unacceptable. This government, and no government, should use public funds to undermine someone's charter rights. That is unacceptable.

Canadians expect the government to uphold the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is exactly what we are doing.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree that organizations that receive government funding should not infringe on the rights guaranteed by the charter.

My colleague said that students should not suffer, and I completely agree.

I remember how last summer, the Liberals were bragging about how there were more jobs in the Canada summer jobs program. However, in Hochelaga, we noticed that each job lasted for fewer weeks. There may have been more jobs, but this is because each job lasted for fewer weeks.

Does the member not think that this is causing students to suffer and that they are being offered lower-quality jobs?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, this is the government that doubled funding to this particular program. There are more jobs. There are more hours. I was happy to hear from my friend, the hon. parliamentary secretary, that applications are at an all-time high.

I am looking forward to seeing more applications to this program, seeing more jobs, and more young Canadians, especially in St. Catharines, and across the country, get to work, and get the skills they need.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the point the member made that we have members of the opposition who seem to want to give misinformation that could ultimately lead to many students not having access to different types of job opportunities.

Can he expand on why it is important for members of Parliament on all sides of the House to look for an agency to support, and to not give misinformation, but provide information that is necessary to ensure that as many groups, both private and non-profit, are engaged in this particular program?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, when I spoke with faith organizations, they raised concerns, but when I read the definition that I brought up in my speech, the concerns were lifted. That is important because faith organizations, the opposition members are right, are doing great work in our community. They are helping refugees. They are helping the homeless. They are helping with food banks and running day cares.

As legislators it is important to read the definition to define the terms. The opposition is excluding that entire point, which is

fundamental to the definition. I beseech them to use that definition as they would any other piece of legislation or anything else from the government, so that they can get jobs for their young constituents, because clearly this is important to them and important to those organizations.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin I want to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to my colleagues this afternoon about the motion. I want to thank the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London for bringing this very important matter forward in the way of a motion and as something we can discuss here in the House.

We are talking today about the change that the Liberals have made to the application process for the Canada summer jobs program. We know that the Canada summer jobs program is a valuable program for numerous organizations all across the country. It provides funding to assist employers, including not-for-profits, that create summer job opportunities for full-time students. There certainly does not need to be anything controversial about a summer jobs program. It is a win-win situation. Students benefit by getting valuable employment and work experience. Communities benefit from the important services provided by these organizations, but with the Liberal government, nothing is sacred.

In the dying days of 2017, the Liberals quietly introduced their new values test requirement for the Canada summer jobs program. When I first learned of this new requirement, I could not believe that the government, even a Liberal government, would demand that the people who serve our communities agree with its Liberal values in order to receive funding. There was no consultation process. There was no public feedback requested. Instead, the Liberals unilaterally decided that only the individuals and organizations who agreed with their prescribed set of values would be worthy of receiving the Canada summer jobs funding. This is just wrong.

Canadians know it. My office has been inundated with emails, letters, and phone calls from concerned Canadians. Many of the calls came from organizations in my riding that have taken advantage of the Canada summer jobs program to hire students for the summer to work in their various organizations. Impacted organizations include day cares, summer camps, small businesses, and municipalities. Each of these organizations read the attestation and felt that to sign it, to agree with the Liberal Party's dogma on certain issues, was an affront to the Charter of Rights. They felt that they would be compromising their beliefs if they signed it.

Business of Supply

I know Liberal members have indicated confusion on this point. Why will Canadians not just sign the attestations? They have told these Canadians to hold their noses and sign it. After all, the supplementary information that was provided by the Liberal government after the swift negative response from Canadians was supposedly meant to clarify what was meant by the wording of the attestation, but the Liberals just do not get it. The Liberals' understanding of tolerance is so narrow that they cannot wrap their heads around the thought that there are Canadians who actually might have different beliefs and values than those of the Liberal Party. The Liberals can only tolerate those opinions, those beliefs, those values that agree with theirs. If people do not agree with them, they are no longer eligible to receive funding for a summer student.

Speaking of Canada's success, the Prime Minister stated the following:

But what's made it work so well in Canada is the understanding that our diversity isn't a challenge to be overcome or a difficulty to be tolerated.

Rather, it's a tremendous source of strength.

However, here we are. The man himself contradicting his famous quote. Why? Because in the Prime Minister's world he thinks he holds the monopoly on what constitutes acceptable diversity. While he may talk a lot about respecting diversity, his actions tell another story. That is the real problem going forward.

It is important to understand that this change represents a marked departure from past practices in this country. Requiring Canadians to agree with a political party's values as a condition of eligibility for grant monies is not how government funding decisions are made. Despite the good work so many organizations do in our communities, caring for the disabled, refugees, providing day camps for children in need, assisting vulnerable youth at risk, providing shelter for abused women and children, providing food for those who are hungry, and also providing shelter for those who are homeless, their applications may be rejected simply for holding beliefs different from those of the people in power.

I received an email from a constituent, Sharon, who said that the fact that employers will now be required to attest that both the job and the organization's core mandate respect certain values, as determined by the federal government, struck her as seriously violating our guaranteed freedoms of religion, thought, belief, opinion, and association offered by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, especially the provisions under section 2. She said that this affected her and upset her. She thought she lived in a democracy where diversity and a mosaic culture were encouraged. She said she did not think she was part of a government-dictated cookie-cutter world. She said that she does not always agree with everyone else's point of view, but she understands that they have a right to their opinions, just as she thought she did.

● (1610)

It is not just people like Sharon who have voiced their concerns. Community organizations from right across the country have been facing a loss of funding that they have relied on for years through the Canada summer jobs program. This is a direct result of the Liberal government's ideological bullying.

Take for example Bridgepark Manor, a not-for-profit organization that offers seniors' and retirement housing in my riding. Bridgepark

applied for Canada summer jobs funding, approximately \$16,000, in order to hire two students to work full time over the summer holidays. The students would have been working in the food services area, gaining valuable skills, serving meals to the seniors at the residence.

As a result of the Liberals values test, the CEO and the board faced an impossible choice: either compromise their values or be denied funding. As a result of the organization making alterations on the application to the attestation, the reply that it received back from the government was that its claim would be rejected. There are now two more students in my riding who will not have an opportunity that would have otherwise been presented.

Here is another example. A community organization responsible for the annual agriculture fair in one of the communities in my riding has used the Canada summer jobs program in the past to hire a summer student. The job requirements include preparing and maintaining the fairgrounds, tasks like painting, lawn mowing, and weed trimming, but it too cannot agree with the Liberals values test. This is yet another job lost.

There are more examples. Catherine, a summer camp director wrote that she rejects this statement on the grounds of her rights to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, and association guaranteed in section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She says that as a Christian organization that deeply values human rights, they will not betray their beliefs or conscience.

Josie, a recreation director with a municipal organization, wrote that without the help of the Canada summer jobs program, her organization's ability to offer programs and services will be severely diminished. She said she believed they were being denied equal access to a government benefit because of their organizational and personal beliefs, and that this violates the charter, which guarantees freedom of religion, thought, belief, and opinion.

I have another one. An arts organization in my riding, of all things, wrote that while they continued to affirm their intention as an association to support rights and freedoms, they protested the attestation requirement of the funding application that divided us along political lines.

The truth of the matter is that this policy is not about the activities or services an organization is engaged in. It is about targeting the personal beliefs of the individuals who run those organizations. That is shameful.

I have heard some Liberals in the House today say that they have taken a brave or bold step by introducing this values test. There is nothing brave about the Liberal Party using the powers of government to suppress views that are different from their own. The real heroes of this story are the many individuals and organizations who, when faced with this kind of discrimination by their own government, chose to stay true to their values. Even though they had nothing to gain and everything to lose, they were willing to take a stand for what they believed in.

I am reminded of the words of former Conservative prime minister John G. Diefenbaker, delivered in a speech in 1960:

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I am a Canadian, a free Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship God in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, free to choose those who govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind.

Diefenbaker was in the midst of pursuing landmark legislation, the Canadian Bill of Rights, a bill introduced to guarantee civil rights for all Canadians, a bold vision for a Canada that respected the rights of individuals, and it was the reason his Conservative government extended the vote to indigenous Canadians, nominated the first indigenous senator, and appointed Canada's first female cabinet minister.

As a pluralistic society, Canada allows for diverse opinions and protects those who may think and believe differently. It was the strong foundation laid by that original bill of rights that paved the way for the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of belief, and freedom of opinion and expression for all Canadians.

• (1615)

In fact, the charter was designed to protect citizens from the government, not the government from them. The Liberals have acted in defiance of that heritage, arrogantly deeming the party's political values above the rights of Canadians outlined in these documents.

I call on the Prime Minister to rescind this shameful attestation requirement for the Canada summer jobs program. I call on the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour to rescind this shameful application. I call on the members of the Liberal Party to do the right thing, to respect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and to vote to rescind this awful attestation.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have one question, and it is a simple question that could be answered with yes or no.

If an organization believed in its core mandate that LGBT people were unacceptable and refused to hire someone that was LGBT, would that organization deserve to receive government money, yes or no?

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, this is a values test. This is a Liberal values test being pushed on every single Canadian.

This should make every single Canadian watching this proceeding here today shake in their seats. This is a values test that applies to the Canada summer jobs program today. It is a values test, and those who do not agree with the ideological positions of the Liberal government are going to be denied funding. The Prime Minister has already stated that he wants to extend this attestation requirement to other programs.

This is a values test that should scare the willies out of every single Canadian.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

At the very least, I can say that I recognize how passionately he defends his opinion. However, we do agree on one thing. If the jobs

we will be approving this summer need to pass the Liberal values test, I will probably also have a problem. However, I would have the same problem if they had to pass a Conservative or even a New Democrat values test.

The focus of these jobs should be respect for the rights and values enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We are talking about the job, not the employer.

Does my colleague see a difference between an employer having beliefs that may conflict with what is enshrined in and protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the job it offers having to comply with the charter?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, shortly after the requirement of this attestation came to be, I was very delighted that the NDP chose to recognize the problem with this values test. They recognized it.

The member clearly indicated he has a problem with a values test from any government, whether it be the current Liberal government, a Conservative government, or in someone's wildest imagination, an NDP government. The member would object to any form of attestation that would require a values test according to that government's ideology.

I was delighted that the NDP initially recognized that position. I was disappointed that, because of the issues that were stated as the values test, the NDP flip-flopped on its position like a fish out of water. It would be nice if it could stand by principles instead of ideology.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so confounded by the mendacious invective from the Conservative benches, and from the leadership, that I hardly know where to start.

I come from a long career in public service and I have seen my share of sophistry and oratorical parlour tricks, where elected members were trying to confuse the public into believing something other than what was true, other than what was being proposed. What I fear here is that the overreach by the Conservative benches on this matter is so great that it is doing damage to the very institution of public service.

Misleading smart, good people, good organizations into believing that they should not sign the attestation, and that they are therefore ineligible for funding, not only harms those institutions but it harms the students.

Does the member not understand that unless an organization is hiring someone to protest a gay marriage, hiring a student to march against an immigration ceremony, or hiring someone to bar access to a health clinic, they should be perfectly fine to sign the attestation and hire a student? Is that not a clear position?

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the member across the way and give my final answer by taking an excerpt out of a four-page letter written by a pastor to his Liberal MP:

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A person's, or church's, religious beliefs and practices are not subject to governmental approval. Pro-life religious organizations have a Charter guaranteed right to speak and act according to their conscience. Period. Personally, and as a church, we do not always agree with the means of action against injustices like abortion which some Christians may espouse. We get it.... But the right for others to follow their own conscience in that matter is sacrosanct, and it is the government's difficult job to protect that liberty—because that liberty, like it or not, is the law. Government officials and staff do not need to like or approve of it, but they must protect it. I'm not sure I understand how a Canadian government has fallen to such levels of intolerance. Is Canada no longer proud of its diversity? To ask people to attest to a set of beliefs or practices not their own is an obscene violation of personal liberty, not to mention privacy, and it is an inherently threatening act towards people and communities of faith. And that's how we feel by all this...threatened.

There is no space in Canada for attestations of this kind, for any purpose, ever. Canada is a diverse place where people disagree, especially over issues like abortion and traditional marriage; political leaders need to make peace with that diversity.

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. We have run out of time. I appreciate that the hon. member had a bit more to say, but we really are past the time for questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I speak in strong support of our Conservative motion calling on the government to remove the outrageous and unconstitutional Liberal values test that requires individuals or organizations applying under the Canada summer jobs program to sign an attestation that they subscribe to and support the principles and values of the Liberal Party of Canada as a prerequisite for funding. The members opposite can sugar-coat, downplay, and misrepresent the values test they have imposed, but make no mistake about it, in substance that is precisely what the government is calling upon individuals and organizations to do. This Liberal values test is wrong. It is discriminatory. It is mean-spirited. It violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

What it means is that churches and faith-based groups right across Canada are going to be denied funding under the Canada summer jobs program, churches and faith-based groups that have relied upon the Canada summer jobs program to do the many good works they do in communities across Canada. These groups, churches, and organizations have hired students to do things like helping refugees, feeding the hungry, and providing summer camps for kids. Not only that, thousands of students across Canada have gained valuable and practical experience. I would submit that, in many cases, it is more than just practical, hands-on experience because when we are talking about working with refugees, assisting and helping feed the hungry, or working with kids at a summer camp, that type of work for a young person, a student, can be meaningful, impactful, life-changing, and life-lasting. However, now that is at risk, thanks to the government's bigoted summer jobs attestation, a Liberal values test.

As a result, churches and faith-based groups are faced with a choice. They can sell out their principles and values by signing the attestation, or they can forfeit funding. This is not something abstract. This is not something academic. This is something real, and it is taking place right across Canada.

The hon. members opposite keep talking about the fact that there really is no problem here and applicants should just sign the attestation. I mean, who could disagree with the attestation?

I have a church in my riding that signed the attestation and sent a letter along with the application. They checked off the attestation indicating that they objected to the attestation and that they believed it contravened the charter rights that apply to them, including freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of belief. What happened to their application? It was rejected. It was sent back to them. So much for the words of those hon. members who say there is no problem here, because here is an example of a church that signed the attestation and had the application rejected.

• (1630)

It was hiring students for many years and had no problem until this Liberal values test. It was hiring students, and I am reading from its application, “to assist persons with disabilities, to assist newcomers to Canada, to assist indigenous peoples, to assist visible minorities, and to work with children and youth.” Thanks to the Liberal government's values test, its application was rejected.

Another organization in my riding has just given up. It said that it cannot, in good conscience, sign on to a values test that talks about a core mandate. It is not about accepting the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is not what the attestation says. It says a lot more than that. It talks about a core mandate, and it goes on. The organization said, “This is not our core mandate. We cannot sign off on that in all honesty. We have more integrity than that. We do not agree with it. It is not our values.” How many other organizations are like that? This organization runs a summer day camp for vulnerable youth. Nonetheless, despite the government's intolerant and bigoted values test, the organization is going to try to move ahead with the summer camp. However, it just does not know whether the summer camp for vulnerable youth will be there this summer. That is a real shame, and that is thanks to the current government.

The Prime Minister likes to talk a good game. As his usual self-righteous self, he speaks about diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance. However, actions speak louder than words. Time and again, the actions of the government are different from the words it speaks with respect to diversity, tolerance, and inclusivity.

The member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley talks about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Through this Canada summer jobs Liberal values test, the government has demonstrated that it has no regard for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is a government that has no regard for fundamental freedoms, the section 2 rights under the charter: freedom of religion, conscience, and expression. These are not just any freedoms but fundamental freedoms.

The Liberal values test is antithetical to inclusivity, diversity, and tolerance. It is antithetical to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is antithetical to Canadian values. If the government meant what it said and did what it said, it would do the right thing and withdraw this bigoted, intolerant, unconstitutional, and Orwellian Liberal values test.

Business of Supply

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really distressing to hear the hon. member across the way continue to confuse and inflame the situation by the constant reference to “values”. In the attestation, the word used is “mandate”. In conversations I have had with churches in my riding, I made it very clear that if there is nothing in their mission statements and vision statements that says they are deliberately in business to work against certain rights and freedoms that women and the LGBTQ2 community enjoy, they should have no problem ticking off the attestation, because that is not the business they are in. I also had a conversation with a Baptist minister and said that the chance of abortion or gay rights coming up at a soccer camp or a cooking class is zero.

Will the member start to take responsibility for using the word “values” incorrectly, when it is not mentioned in the attestation? Will he take responsibility for the fact that a lot of churches will not go ahead and run their summer camp programs because of the way he has deliberately misinterpreted what the attestation says?

● (1635)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, in fact, it does say “values”. It also speaks about a core mandate and goes beyond stating that an organization adhere to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What the hon. member is saying is simply false. Not only that, based on the experience of the church in my riding, it apparently is not even good enough to sign the attestation. In the case of that church, it was rejected out of hand on the basis that it simply expressed opposition to having to sign the attestation for a program that would have provided services to indigenous peoples, disabled Canadians, refugees, children, and youth. It is a real shame.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we hear Conservative speaker after Conservative speaker mention a Liberal “values test”, and that seems like code. They do not want to come out and say pro-choice. They do not want the Canadian public to find out, so they are trying to embed this code, “Liberal values test”, which is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is shameful.

Knowing full well that nothing in this attestation limits anyone's access to freedom of religion or freedom of speech, how can the hon. member, who is a lawyer, stand in this House and suggest that this violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I have no hesitation talking about what this attestation says, which includes a core mandate respecting reproductive rights. In a free and democratic society, there can be no religious or values test, and that is precisely what the government is trying to impose upon churches and faith-based organizations. The hon. member knows full well that many churches and faith-based organizations cannot, in good conscience, sign on to that, because at the end of the day, that is not part of their core mandate.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the other two parties in this House always claim that they are progressive. I am reminded of what the great free market economist Friedrich Hayek said, that inside every progressive is a totalitarian screaming to get out.

This is why I am so proud to be a Conservative. In our caucus, there are people with multiple views. I happen to be pro-choice.

Others happen to be pro-life. We have members who work with the LGBT community. Not once have I, as a Conservative MP, ever been coerced or told to change my beliefs. My beliefs and the beliefs of my friends and colleagues are accepted and cherished by all of us, regardless of what those beliefs are.

What is it about the Conservative Party that makes us so different from the totalitarians on the other side?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, unlike those on the other side, we welcome Canadians to freely express their views. We value the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We respect fundamental freedoms: freedom of religion, conscience, and expression. That is something the hon. members opposite seem to have a problem with.

How did we even get here? How did we even get to this point? There was no problem with this program until the government decided to drive a wedge and divide Canadians. It is politics at its worst.

● (1640)

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Kootenay—Columbia, Health; the hon. member for North Island—Powell River, Access to Information; and the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, Housing.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a great honour to rise in this House and represent the people of Timmins—James Bay. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, my very close neighbour from the great riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

As honoured as I am to stand here, I find it unfortunate to watch the Liberals and Conservatives use a program for giving young people opportunities as a proxy for a culture war and to see them talking about freedom and totalitarianism. The Liberals are using their full-progress agenda, when we are talking about organizations that do an incredible amount of work in each of our communities to help young people. That is the focus of what we should be dealing with here.

I want to say that the Canada summer jobs program in my region of Timmins—James Bay does extraordinary work. My riding is bigger than Great Britain, and as an MP, I am very involved in making sure that the program is accessible, right across the region, to ensure a balance so that communities in the far, isolated reserves of James Bay can have young people hired and that in the isolated farming communities, students who come home can get work. It is for the Franco-Ontarian community to make sure that all the cultural organizations have representation and for the great groups like the YMCA, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and Science Timmins.

This is an incredible program. What I find very unfortunate in this debate is the undermining of that program, by both the Liberals and the Conservatives, and the undermining of people of religious faith who believe that they can access this program.

Business of Supply

At the outset, for me the issue of a woman's right to choose is non-negotiable. It is a fundamental principle, but it is not the issue we tend to deal with when we are hiring for Canada summer jobs. However, there have been abuses, and I am glad to see that the Liberal government recognized that there were abuses.

In my riding, every year a group I never heard of before, called Priests for Life, got on the list to get Canada summer jobs. I had never heard of Priests for Life, so I checked them out on their website. They have an American flag. They have the White House. It is a militant, right-wing, anti-abortion organization. It should not be getting money for young people in my region. I looked it up to see what kind of work young people do. They actually have on their page a special link to Real Estate for Life. It is promoting real estate agents for life. Talk about the money changers in the temple. That is an organization that should never have gotten the money.

An abuse like that could have been easily fixed by the Liberal government stating that if an organization uses the funds to promote an extremist agenda, it will not be eligible. However, the Liberals, being Liberals, came up with a very ham-fisted response.

Call me cynical, but the Liberals love culture wars. They made a values test that was unnecessary for all the organizations that sign up. Now they are trying to do damage control by saying that they did not really mean that. The Conservatives, of course, love this kind of culture war and are jumping on it.

What is really concerning to me is that all the good religious groups that apply year after year are being given the impression that they are no longer eligible because of the abuse of the process by one, two, or three extremists groups across Canada that should never have been eligible in the first place.

I learned my politics in the church. I remember as a young kid the priests organizing for the grape boycott and learning about Cesar Chavez. Growing up we thought that like not eating fish on Friday, eating grapes was some kind of mortal sin, because there was a major international boycott to defend the farm workers. We learned that in our parishes. We learned about standing up for the poor. We learned about public service.

As I grew older, I continued my work. I was a youth leader in our church. The work we did in our church was helping kids from all backgrounds, kids who never went to church, kids of any faith who had no place else to go, and offering them summer events. I see in my region that faith groups are still doing that. That is good, important work. I want to say that we value that work. We value it across the faith spectrum of the groups that are doing social justice, the groups that are helping and encouraging young people. That is where we need to focus. We need to talk about the role Canada summer jobs can play in offering young people opportunities.

●(1645)

In a region as big as mine, we see youth outmigration as one of the fundamental problems facing our communities. If young people want post-secondary education, they have to leave home to go to university. Many of them are so loaded with student debt that coming home is not an option. Just as we lose our trees, just as our hydro leaves, just as our copper, our gold, and our nickel heads south to help Queen's Park, so do our young people.

It has been an fundamental principle for me in using the Canada summer jobs program to make sure that a young person in Matachewan gets an opportunity for employment, that young people in Timmins are able to get good work experience working with excellent organizations, like the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and that the kids in Fort Albany are able to save money, especially the ones who have to leave to go to school.

That is the kind of vision we have to have for the Canada summer jobs program. What we have seen from the Liberal government is a completely ham-fisted, over-the-top response that was completely unnecessary. In doing so, it has rattled public confidence in the Canada summer jobs program. I think it has unfairly politicized the Canada summer jobs program and made people in the faith community believe that they are not eligible and are going to have to go through some kind of bizarre test that the Conservatives are talking about to prove their worthiness. All that was needed was a simple check to make sure that those extremist organizations were not abusing the program. Shame on the Conservatives for telling the faith communities across Canada that they are no longer eligible.

As a member of Parliament, I take my work on the Canada summer jobs program extremely seriously. I am involved with Service Canada in laying out what the priorities are for our region. For me, it is the importance of isolated, rural communities; making sure that people get good experience in the non-profit sector; and the work of cultural organizations in our region, particularly in a rural, francophone region. These are organizations that play a vital role.

It is my role as an MP to be part of that. It is my responsibility as a member of Parliament to make sure that we are getting the maximum amount. By the way, we get record funding year after year in Timmins—James Bay. I just want to say that we are making sure every year that the maximum dollars that are eligible come into our riding and are best used.

This is the conversation we need to have. I would implore the Liberal government to realize that their ham-fisted responses are not the best way to solve things that could be solved in a straightforward manner and to reassure Canadians. I ask my colleagues in the Conservative Party, as well, to stop the fear game. Faith communities of all faiths are still very much a central part of helping in public service, of ensuring that young people get opportunities, and of doing the front-line work making our communities better and safer and giving young people hope.

Business of Supply

This is our fundamental role, giving young people a belief that Canada is a land of opportunity and giving them a reason to hope. We can use the Canada summer jobs program in such an important and valuable way. I am here to say that we will work as New Democrats to defend the Canada summer jobs program and keep it from the nasty culture wars the Liberals and Conservatives love to engage in whenever they get the opportunity. Shame on them for using the Canada summer jobs program to fight their proxy wars.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed to hear my colleague say shame on the Conservatives for telling faith groups that they did not qualify. I can assure my colleague that it was faith groups and non-faith groups that approached us, as members of Parliament. They were very concerned about this attestation, which demanded that they sign a statement, which, in their conscience, they could not sign. Do we have freedom of belief, freedom of religion, and freedom of conscience, or do we not?

It is disappointing to hear my colleague say that. Could he just clarify what he means, when a person with strong convictions on any topic is forced to deny those beliefs simply to get government funding? Is that not the very definition of hypocrisy?

• (1650)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about programs that service young people. That is what our focus has to be. The fact that those programs have to be committed to a vision of inclusion, I have no problem with.

This is a fundamental question. What we have seen from the Conservatives today is that they are saying that signing is an issue about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that it is an attack on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That to me is illogical. They have also suggested that their solution would be to simply say that it is a charitable organization. Well, I am sorry but just because one gets charitable status does not mean that one should get money to help young people. I would not give it to the Fraser Institute, although God knows how it managed to get charitable status in the first place.

Then I heard the Conservatives suggest earlier today they thought that with the charitable status, they could start going after groups for their charitable status. Whoa, who invented that? It was the Conservatives who attacked groups like Environmental Defence, and attacked PEN, the international organization representing the rights of imprisoned authors. They were being attacked by the Conservatives under the CRA for what they said was political meddling.

I think that the Conservatives have used this as a proxy war to fight with the Liberals. Let us stay focused on the need to ensure that young people have access to good opportunities in the summer.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is confusing in terms of where the NDP actually might be on the issue.

A great deal of thought went into the application process. The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour came up with the proposal which received great support from a wide spectrum of stakeholders. In fact, at the time when it was announced, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, an NDP member of

Parliament, said that, no, it was terrible, but within hours, of course, he had changed his mind and said it was a good thing.

Now, when I listen to the member across the way, he is adding to the confusion. What is the NDP position on it? Is the NDP saying that what the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour has done by incorporating the attestation is a positive thing, or does the NDP believe that it is a negative thing?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, being that my hon. colleague has to make stuff up about what my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley said I would suggest is indicative of basically his entire political career in the House where he acts as sort of the Liberal version of Ezra Levant on a daily basis.

If he is confused and is worried that he cannot understand, the fact is I said very clearly that it was appalling the ham-fisted way the Liberals responded to something that could have been a simple check. That would be what good government would be. However, the reason the Liberals want to do that is so that they can engage in a culture war with the Conservatives, and they have a culture war.

What we are doing as New Democrats is working in our ridings reassuring religious communities that, yes, they could still get this funding and to not get caught up in the dumb games being played by the Liberals because of their ham-fisted response or the fearmongering of the Conservatives.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to understand today's motion, we need to understand how the Canada summer jobs program works and especially how members of Parliament are involved.

This is a program that helps young people by giving them job opportunities. The purpose is not to replace a worker who would have done the work anyway. It is perfectly clear that when employers apply for funding, it is for a project that will not happen if they do not get the money. For example, an employer cannot hire a young person to do the work a municipal employee would have done. The employer has to prove that the job would not exist without the funding. The purpose of the program is not to replace existing workers by giving their jobs to students. I think that is key to understanding the program. It really is about special projects.

The first phase of an MP's involvement is identifying their riding's priorities. For example, in my riding, I will be focusing on projects related to agriculture and agri-food, projects that support people who are suffering, and projects that promote tourism. Those are the priorities I chose for my riding. I reassess regularly. I also chose to add projects that promote physical activity. It really is up to MPs to set priorities.

If members do not know which priorities to choose, they can get help. For example, Employment and Social Development Canada can tell MPs what their ridings' priorities were in the past. That is the first phase of an MP's involvement: setting priorities. Projects that are directly related to priorities identified by MPs get a few extra points added to their score. That, in a nutshell, is the first part of members' involvement in the program.

Business of Supply

Next, officials carry out a detailed analysis of all projects. They use the scoring guide to award points to every project. Once all projects have been scored, MPs receive the list of recommended projects and the list of projects that were not recommended because their score did not qualify them for funding.

MPs are asked to review this list with Canada summer jobs officials. They can ask questions about the applications, such as what exactly the project was about and where the individual would work. They can request additional information about the projects to have a good understanding of how much was allocated and why. If they disagree, they can ask for changes. For example, they can ask that additional hours be allocated. If they strongly disagree with a project, they can even ask that it not receive funding. The fact that the project was changed at the request of the MP and the reasons for the changes are clearly indicated. The proponent will be informed.

Thus, if projects do not respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, MPs already have an opportunity to intervene without the changes that the Liberals tried to make. We can ask what the project entails and what organization is sponsoring it. I believe it is important that we make an effort to find out, especially when we receive lists of projects where the business is identified by its business number. I do this all the time when I review my list. I ask a lot of questions because the business number does not tell me the exact nature of the business. Even without the Liberal changes, MPs can intervene to ensure that the projects are good ones and that they will help young people improve their skills. If necessary, we can intervene if we believe that changes should be made.

• (1655)

It is important to fully understand that, because we are now in a situation where some members may have shown a lack of judgment by favouring organizations whose mandate and work ran counter to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Thanks to a lapse in judgment by certain members, the decision was made to apply a clumsy systemic solution that worried many organizations, because the solution was poorly explained and it was unclear where it was coming from.

I think it is sad that we have ended up in this situation, because this program does a lot of good in our communities. We had some leeway. It could be said that this has scared off organizations that might be of a religious nature, but that were nevertheless working on the ground to help people.

In my riding, for example, there is a religious organization called La Fabrique de La Reine, which submitted a project for a religious interpretive museum. A museum was created in the church with all the traditional Catholic objects of the past, and visitors learn about what they are. This is really a tourism project, since no one is even being asked to promote religious values. The project is related to religion, of course, but it is much more about history and tourism. Because of the misinformation that followed the change in the program introduced by the Liberals, this organization may have misinterpreted what it was about.

When people commit an error in judgment, it is worth asking whether the solution is to make systemic changes to a program that

was working fine, or whether any changes could have been implemented less clumsily.

The Canada summer jobs program is really about the work, not the organization. In other words, no points are given for what is not on the form. We do not evaluate the organization, we evaluate the work. For example, tourism is one of my priorities, and if a tourism business wants to hire someone to cut the grass on its property, it will not get many points because that kind of work is not directly related to tourism. It is just maintenance work, and work like that does not enable young people to acquire specific skills.

What we want is to select projects that will really enable young people to develop specific skills. For example, we select projects that are directly related to the established priorities. Take tourism, which is one of my riding's priorities. If the project involves setting up an exhibit about women who have changed the history of Abitibi—Témiscamingue, that is really a tourism-related project, because the person involved will develop management and research skills and will have to do advertising and set up the exhibit. That is the kind of work that really helps people develop skills.

It is extremely important to understand that the program is centred on the task and the work completed. Obviously, it is important to verify the organization you are dealing with.

That brings me to another problem that was created when the Conservatives were in power. A lot of positions were cut in various regions. Applications addressed to Canada summer jobs used to be processed in Abitibi—Témiscamingue by my constituency employee who was working for Service Canada at the time. His position was cut when the government decided to bring the Canada summer jobs application processing back to Laval. Now Laval reviews the projects and makes the decisions. At the end of the day it is the member of Parliament who has the final say, of course, but Laval reviews the project that may or may not be good for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

• (1700)

That is also very problematic because people unfamiliar with the region cannot identify the organizations that might be a bit shady.

• (1705)

[English]

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

Mr. Speaker, I was a bit surprised by the response I received from the member for Timmins—James Bay when I posed a legitimate question with respect to the debate today. It is important we make it clear.

The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour has done a fantastic job in expanding the student summer jobs program and working with different stakeholders to bring forward an attestation, which is being fairly well received. I also understood that it was received relatively well by New Democrats. I can recall the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley initially criticizing the government on it, but within hours apologizing for his criticism.

Business of Supply

The member's colleague, who sits two or three rows in front, just finished saying the Liberals were playing a dumb game, implying that it was a bad thing.

I am interested in knowing what the NDP's position is on what is required through the application process. Does that party have a problem with the attestation in particular?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, the problem I have with the attestation is how it was introduced, the lack of information about it, and the confusion it has caused. The lack of clear information created a panic. This was not the smartest way to introduce such a measure. It caused confusion within our organizations.

As for the minister's performance, a decision was made to double the budgets, but it came at the last minute. We appreciate the change, but did not have enough time to inform organizations that more money was available and that they should apply. Therefore, all projects have been accepted. Projects that received only seven points, in other words very weak projects that would not give someone much in the way of skills, have been accepted because we did not have time to advise the organizations doing good work that more money was available and that they could hire more than one employee if they applied again. Since the budgets were increased at the last minute, we did not have time to do our job and tell people that there were additional employment opportunities and they should submit more applications.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was a great description of what the Canada summer jobs program was and how MPs interacted with it.

All of us here work very hard every year, going through those lists to ensure that many young Canadians get good jobs in the summer. We really appreciate the program but we do have problems with it. Every job that my riding received last year had a maximum of nine or ten weeks, which excluded all university students. We had problems like that.

I was glad the member for Timmins—James Bay mentioned the good work that faith-based organizations do. We have a lot of those groups in my riding and I volunteer with a lot of them in the summer. I am so impressed.

Could the member expand on that aspect of this debate?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, indeed, there are many religious organizations or organizations with religious affiliations that offer very good jobs in service of the community. These communities are open to all candidates, even if they hold different beliefs.

We must focus on the work the youth are being asked to do. There are different organizations, but we must focus on what these people will be asked to do. If we have any doubt, in looking at the recommendations, it is our job as members of Parliament to clarify, before we sign anything, whether the work in question will violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We have a duty to

intervene and to say that it is inappropriate for the organization in question to receive funding.

• (1710)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Lethbridge in resuming debate, I will let her know there are only about five minutes remaining in the time for the business of supply this afternoon, but I will get her started just the same.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lethbridge.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again and again, we watch as the government puts itself before the people of Canada, which is the exact opposite of why a federal government exists. It is the exact opposite of why any government exists.

Government is in place to serve the people of the country, and in this case, a very vast country, composed of people from different ethnic backgrounds and religious or faith backgrounds. People from different countries all over the world come to Canada and call it home. The government has decided it is going to create an attestation statement within the summer jobs grant application. That attestation statement is incredibly discriminatory in nature toward Canadians and the diversity that exists within our country.

Let me explain more.

The purpose of the grant is to hire students to take on jobs for the summer. In order to apply for the grant, organizations now have to sign off on a values statement the Liberals have dictated to them. There is no choice in the matter. Institutions, organizations, and businesses that apply for the grant do not get to say no, that they do not agree with it, but that this is how they are advocating for the rights within the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Instead, they have to sign off on the values the Liberals are imposing on them, which I is a direct attack on their charter rights of religious freedom, rights of conscience, freedom of belief, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly. They are no longer granted these rights under the current government. Instead, they have to sign this statement that is ascribed by the Liberals, as if they are the values held by every Canadian. That simply is not the case.

Many organizations being brought under attack by the Canada summer jobs attestation are in fact faith-based organizations. However, there are others as well. Let me talk a little about these faith-based organizations.

Many organizations in my riding of Lethbridge, Alberta will be impacted. I have heard specifically from 15 that are being denied funding by the government, which equates to close to 100 jobs in my riding. Young people from the college and the university in Lethbridge will no longer be able to find those jobs this summer because of the government's ideals that are being propagated.

I will talk about a few of them.

One of them is SABC, a summer camp for kids. It brings in kids from indigenous communities and children from homes where they are perhaps underprivileged or just have a hard time making ends meet. They bring kids in from the foster care system. They also bring in kids from all sorts of homes all over Alberta. Those children get to go to camp and enjoy all sorts of activities and care. It is an amazing time of their lives. Without the Canada summer jobs grant, that opportunity has now been taken from SABC.

SABC is hearty and it will find other ways to make it happen, because the people are compassionate and passionate about serving Canadian children, specifically the children in my province. They will move forward, but with no help from the government.

Another organization in my riding offers services with regard to the housing insecure and homeless. This organization does tremendous work feeding, clothing, caring for the needs of those individuals. This organization will be rejected funding based on this attestation statement.

Another organization in my riding does incredible things to care for refugee families, particularly Syrian refugees. It has done phenomenal work. It would normally hire several students over the summer to continue that work. It will no longer be able to do that.

Another is The Mustard Seed in Calgary. Three hundred young people will be denied an opportunity for employment because of the attestation statement.

The government talks a lot about compassion, dignity, and preserving diversity, but that is a lot of talk and there is no action to back it up. At the end of the day, if we want to raise our young people to function within society with compassion and increase their civic engagement, then we have to be willing to facilitate that. One of the ways we do that is through the Canada summer jobs grants. What better way than putting their boots on the ground and helping the homeless or being able to work with children at a summer camp? These are acts of compassion. These are our Canadian values.

The government has tried to paint these organizations into a corner. It has tried to force them to sign off on a values statement, which these organizations simply cannot sign in good conscience. That is a breach of their charter rights.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m. it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*Translation*]

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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Private Members' Business

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred to Monday, March 19, at the end of the time provided for government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly the recorded division is deferred until Monday, March 19, at the conclusion of government orders.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m. in order to commence with private members' business.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from October 3, 2017, consideration of the motion that Bill C-364, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act (political financing), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last considered this motion, the hon. member for Montcalm had five minutes remaining.

The hon. member for Montcalm.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, the last time I spoke, I tried to convince my Liberal and Conservative colleagues of the merits of the bill introduced by my colleague from Terrebonne on political financing.

I would like to give an overview of this bill for the benefit of voters. This bill seeks to introduce or reintroduce per-vote party financing. This small measure would cost very little, benefit democracy, and produce a number of worthwhile results.

We have had several discussions and many questions in question period about the cash for access dynamic of political fundraising, or in other words, privileged access to the government and the Prime Minister. I am talking about private dinners that will now be advertised. People will be invited, and it will be announced that a private dinner will be held at the cost of \$1,500 a person for those who can afford to attend and who have things to say to the Prime Minister about the interests of lobby groups. The Liberals think that this is a big step for democracy because they are now going to advertise these events.

Private Members' Business

At this moment, however, how many of the viewers watching this debate on television can afford to donate \$1,500 to a political party, seeing as, unlike lobbies, they have no interests to advance by donating to the Prime Minister's riding of Papineau through a fundraiser being held in Vancouver? These people attended a \$1,500-a-plate dinner and told the Prime Minister what they wanted, and the same day their bank was approved, poof, \$70,000 magically found its way to the coffers of Papineau, 5,000 kilometres away. What a way to finance an election.

The mere suspicion and appearance of a kickback is enough to damage our democratic institutions and undermine public trust in democratic institutions.

When it was in opposition, this government said it wanted to restore the per-vote subsidy. Now that it holds the purse strings, it is backtracking under pressure from multiple lobbies. Right now, its coffers are full, as are the coffers of the Conservative Party. It is well known that power alternates between these two parties. They are two sides of the same coin. It comes as no surprise today to see these two parties joining forces to wipe out the per-vote subsidy.

This flies in the face of the Liberal government's apparently empty promise to reform the Canada Elections Act and introduce a fairer voting system, but it is not the first time the government has said one thing and done another. One of the reasons we wanted a fairer voting system was to give Canadians an opportunity to express a broader range of ideas in the House by giving smaller parties a voice and seats in the House and enabling them to participate in democratic debate. Since that did not happen, we think the least the government can do is encourage people to express their political views by providing per-vote funding.

Per-vote funding would enable voters to vote for what they believe in so that a vote for, say, the Green Party, which is a minority party in the House, would not be a total waste. It would give such minority parties a say in the democratic debate of a democratic society for four years. It would enable small parties to participate on a more level playing field in the democratic debate of a democratic society as expressed in an election campaign.

The government wants to backtrack on this. I am disgusted at the government's failure to keep yet another promise.

● (1720)

It is disgusting.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-364, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, introduced by the hon. member for Terrebonne.

Bill C-364 seeks to do two things. First, it seeks to re-establish the per-vote subsidy, which provides that after a federal election political parties receive taxpayer subsidies based upon the number of votes they received during the previous election. Second, it seeks to reduce the maximum amount an individual can contribute to a political party from \$1,500 to \$500.

I oppose Bill C-364 because I do not support the re-establishment of the per-vote subsidy, nor do I believe it makes sense or see any

compelling reason for why the maximum limit should be reduced from \$1,500 to \$500.

The heart of this bill relates to re-establishing the per-vote subsidy, and I want to take a bit of time to talk about why it is I oppose the re-establishment of the per-vote subsidy. In that regard, it is helpful to provide some context in terms of how the per-vote subsidy came to be.

It came to be as part and parcel with political financing reforms introduced by the Chrétien government in 2003, whereby a \$5,000 maximum cap was set in terms of contributions to political parties. That change in political financing laws was a step in the right direction, to the Chrétien government's credit. It is something we continued when the previous Conservative government reduced the maximum contribution amount and banned union and corporate donations altogether.

When the \$5,000 cap was introduced, it constituted a monumental change in political financing laws in Canada. Indeed, prior to that, there were really no rules or limits. Unions and corporations could donate large sums of money to political parties. In that fundraising environment, it is no surprise that political parties often relied upon a smaller pool of donors who contributed large sums of money, whether it be from corporations, unions, or other wealthy individuals.

Then the rules changed, and changed very quickly, almost overnight. As a result, the per-vote subsidy was introduced to allow political parties to transition and acclimatize to the new rules respecting fundraising activities. It was never intended that the per-vote subsidy would be permanent; rather, it was intended to be an interim measure. It is precisely for that reason the previous Conservative government phased out the per-vote subsidy following the 2011 election.

● (1725)

There are proponents of re-establishing the per-vote subsidy, and they argue that it is a more fair and equitable way in which to finance political parties. I respectfully disagree with that assertion. I say it is an unfair way to finance political parties, starting with asking taxpayers to pick up and subsidize, out of sweat-soaked taxpayers' dollars, political parties. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that re-establishing the per-vote subsidy would cost taxpayers \$45 million annually. I can think of a lot of better ways to use 45 million taxpayers' dollars than to subsidize political parties.

Moreover, I would submit that the per-vote subsidy is unfair in as much as the party that receives the largest share of the votes receives the largest subsidy. Why might that be a problem? Is it fair to ask taxpayers to continue to subsidize a political party that they may no longer support, that they may no longer agree with, having regard for the fact that there could be a significant shift in support between elections? I would say that is not fair.

In that regard, as a result, almost always there is a built-in advantage for governing parties over opposition parties. Again, I say that does not sound very fair. That does not sound very equitable. In addition, it provides a significant advantage to established political parties and a significant disadvantage to new parties. After all, a party that competed in a previous election would receive large amounts of taxpayer-subsidized funds, whereas a new party would receive nothing, if it was a new party that did not compete in the previous election.

There are many examples in Canadian history where political parties have emerged to go on to be very successful, whether it be the Reform Party or the Bloc Québécois, of which the member for Terrebonne was a member at least up until yesterday.

For all of those reasons, I would submit that the per-vote subsidy is not fair and is not equitable.

Proponents would go on to say that this bill would help take money out of politics, except that it does not take money out of politics because it provides that individuals can continue to contribute to political parties, as I believe they should. All it does is provide a whole new stream of revenue, courtesy of the taxpayer, to political parties.

Then there are proponents who would say that at least it would diminish the need for the Liberals to engage in their unethical pay-to-play, cash for access, \$1,500 fundraisers. I say that we do not need to pass Bill C-364 for the Liberals to end cash for access. All that needs to happen is for the Prime Minister to follow his “Open and Accountable Government”. Do members remember that document? It was the code of conduct that the Prime Minister said would bind him, his cabinet ministers, and his parliamentary secretaries.

“Open and Accountable Government” provides that there should be no preferential access to government, and no perception of preferential access to government. Imagine that: the Prime Minister actually doing what he said, keeping his word to Canadians. I know for this Prime Minister, it is a truly novel concept.

For all of those reasons, while I believe this is a well-intentioned bill, I cannot support it.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to talk about this bill and the discussions that I have had about political financing, especially with regard to Quebec.

I would like to explain my particular situation in my riding, because it is especially important for understanding this matter. When I became an MP, I was fortunate that my provincial representative was an excellent politician who cared about people. We should recognize the excellent work done by others, no matter the party they represent. I have been fortunate to have had François Gendron as my MLA for my entire life. He recently announced that he will be retiring after serving in the National Assembly for 40 years. He deserves our congratulations.

This man is a walking encyclopedia. He knows about everything that has happened in provincial politics over the past 40 years. He

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was elected in 1976, when René Lévesque first formed a government, and has served ever since. I was able to talk to him and to understand everything that happened, where we started out, and where we are now.

Quebec went through a crisis in terms of political financing. The Charbonneau commission revealed the extent of the collusion and the organized donation systems. This led to some soul searching in Quebec about what to do. Quebec decided to limit donations to \$100 per person, with no tax credit, and to fund parties with subsidies based on votes. After every general election in Quebec, each party receives a subsidy based on the number of votes obtained, and this is calculated according to a specific formula. This lets small parties obtain subsidies to support their operations based on the popular support they receive.

The smaller parties that are particularly focused on defending the most vulnerable still manage to do their work. Obviously, when people try to defend the most vulnerable, something that is very dear to me, it is clear that those people are rarely in a financial position to make donations to show their appreciation for the MP's work and help the MP get re-elected because they know that the MP is truly devoted to them. Those people do not have the financial capacity for that and I would never ask them for anything. I know that they are not in a financial position for that.

When parties receive funding based on the number of votes that they get, people know that when they vote, they are making their small contribution to help the party continue its work.

In our federal system, where we have completely eliminated the per-vote contribution to parties, people do not see how they can tangibly help the members or the parties. That was a real loss. The government says that it should not be up to taxpayers to pay for the political parties. That is not true because that is happening now.

When the Prime Minister gets a \$1,500 donation, the millionaire who made it gets \$650 in tax credits. The existing tax credit system makes it so that I, the taxpayer, am paying to finance the Liberal Party. It is inaccurate to say that, under the current system, all taxpayers are not funding political parties. They are. However, the problem is that it is the wealthiest people who decide where all taxpayers' money goes. Low-income Canadians get a non-refundable tax credit. In other words, they do not get a cent.

Consider the example of my husband, who has a relatively low income. We have chosen to do things differently. He is a stay-at-home dad. He does not get anything back in return when he makes a contribution to my riding association to help me continue my work. He pays it entirely out of his pocket.

• (1735)

He gets absolutely nothing towards his tax return, because his income is too low. Other non-refundable tax credits exist that make it possible for him to look for more, so it does him absolutely no good. He does not get any more money back.

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The poorest people who make political donations do not get a tax credit. They do not see any of that money again. Only wealthy people get some of it back in a tax refund. Ultimately, it is the wealthiest people who make political donations who decide how the political parties are financed. It is not all taxpayers who decide. At least when contributions are made based on the number of votes received, that means all taxpayers, in theory, the ones who vote, are deciding how the money is distributed based on people's political convictions. My colleague's bill deserves to be sent to committee for further study.

There are obviously financial considerations. We will have to look into this to find the best formula. The amount per vote or the maximum donation amount may need to be changed.

I am sure that my colleague is prepared to hear different scenarios and calculations in committee. If the committee determines that it would be better to move forward with a maximum donation of \$100, with no tax rebate, and a higher per-vote contribution, my colleague will be open to that.

There are a variety of possible formulas based on the main principle, but in order to choose the right one, we will need to bring in an expert to go over our options. We must support the bill so that it can be sent to committee.

The bill is currently at second reading. The question now is whether we support the principle of fairer political financing. Each member here must be able to rise and say that he or she supports the principle, that it is an important issue, and that we must look at all of the options.

If the committee hears different funding options and determines that none of them are any good, it will do what needs to be done and decide not to pursue further study. If the bill does not go to committee, we cannot hear from these experts, who can provide potential scenarios and provide figures. This bill must go further, so that we can get an idea of what it all means.

That has a considerable impact on the MP's work. I have talked to MPs who worked under the former and current system in Quebec. They say that this system works very well and that they are not spending all their time at fundraising activities. They can truly focus on politics and doing their work as MPs. When MPs are running left and right to raise funds, they are not doing non-partisan work. They have more contact with people who are associated with them, whereas when they can spend more time on politics they are available to everyone and not just those who are affiliated with their political party.

I was elected in Abitibi—Témiscamingue to help everyone in that riding, whether they are separatists or federalists. To me, the person who enters my office is above all someone who deserves to receive services, deserves for me to be there for them. It does not matter if they voted for me or not, the important thing is for me to work for them. Even though I try to limit the impact this might have on my work as an MP, I would really like to be better able to do the work of a neutral MP, instead of having to go from here to there to raise funds.

It would be much more effective if we could really address the question and study the bill in committee. We could look at whether

this truly is a fairer solution that will help prevent the kinds of abuses we saw with the Prime Minister's private dinners and with millionaires prepared to pay \$1,500 to meet him. I sincerely doubt that they would have paid to meet just any backbench Liberal MP. We all know that these people would never have paid \$1,500 to meet the member from the back of the room whose name they probably do not even know.

● (1740)

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-364, introduced by the member for Terrebonne.

[English]

This private member's bill, Bill C-364, would amend Canada's Elections Act and Income Tax Act in the following ways.

First, it would substantially lower the contribution limits to political entities. For example, it would reduce the maximum annual contribution that individuals could make to each registered political party from \$1,550 down to \$500, which is a reduction of more than two-thirds, and would make similar reductions for other political entities, such as candidates and leadership contestants.

Further, it would reinstate the quarterly allowance to political parties. This allowance was introduced initially in 2004 and then phased out in 2015. Finally, it would amend the Income Tax Act to increase the tax credit benefit for those contributing more than \$750.

I would like to say that while I appreciate the member for Terrebonne's efforts to improve political financing in Canada, I also want to flag that there are elements of the bill that are cause for concern. First, this legislation is expensive. In fact, the parliamentary budget office website states with respect to the bill:

PBO estimates that, in total, the cost to the federal government will be \$45.2 million in 2018, increasing to \$46.2 million in 2021. The reintroduction of a quarterly allowance, which is paid from the Consolidated Revenue Fund to registered political parties, represents the overwhelming majority of the cost.

However, this is a time when our government is focusing federal resources on top priority issues like affordable housing, climate action, pharmacare, and help for the middle class and those working hard to join it. These are just a few examples of the work we are embarking on as a result of listening to the concerns of Canadians.

Our government knows that Canadians have good reason to be proud of our democracy. We will always have more work to do to make it even better, and we are going about that work. However, we cannot forget that there are already considerable supports existing in the system, specifically generous tax credits for financial contributors. Candidates and parties are also reimbursed for, or rebated, a significant portion of their campaign expenses from Elections Canada.

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The tax credit for donations in 2015 cost the treasury an estimated \$55 million. After the 2015 election, \$60.7 million was reimbursed to parties and another \$42.7 million went to the official agents for candidates' campaigns, for a total cost to Canadians of \$158 million. Had Bill C-364 been in place in 2015, the total cost over the subsequent four years would have been \$278 million, an increase of 76% over the actual costs. That number does not even include other subsidies contained in the Canada Elections Act, such as the provision of broadcasting time to registered parties.

Another financial concern is that this legislation would give larger tax breaks to those contributing more than \$750. The Department of Finance predicts that this could result in a decline in federal revenues by up to \$2 million in years when there is a leadership contest under way. I would also argue that this would be a regressive tax change. It would allow wealthier Canadians to receive a larger benefit for their donations.

The bill also removes the ceiling on what could be claimed under its provisions. By extension, this would be most beneficial to the wealthiest Canadians. Yet another concern is that this bill would drop contribution limits to leadership contestants from \$1,550 to \$1,000.

As members know, 2017 was the 35th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We all know that Canadians deeply value our charter, and we know it is a model for new democracies around the world. Section 3 of the charter guarantees every eligible Canadian citizen the right to vote and to run in an election. Section 2, which includes the freedoms of association and expression, gives Canadian citizens and permanent residents the right to donate to a party. This right is of course subject to reasonable limitations.

Political parties are a necessary and important part of our democratic process. They unite people who come from different geographic regions. They unite people who have different perspectives. Parties help to mobilize citizens around ideas they cherish. As former Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci said, "Political parties provide individual citizens with an opportunity to express an opinion on the policy and functioning of government."

Canadians participate in our democracy not just by voting or donating to a party. They can also become politically active as a party volunteer. However, many Canadians do not have either the time or desire to support parties in that way, so for some, donating is how they choose to have their voices heard.

• (1745)

This is one of the big reasons why our government believes strongly in maintaining a balanced, open, and transparent political financing system. Be assured that we are continuing to review the rules for political financing to ensure that Canada has a balanced approach.

Another aspect of political fundraising that our government has been focused on is Bill C-50, which has recently passed third reading in the House of Commons, and is now being deliberated in the Senate. Bill C-50 would ensure that any fundraising activity, which costs more than \$200, where a cabinet minister, including the Prime Minister are present, or a party leader or a leadership contestant is in attendance, must be reported five days in advance on the party's

website, and the guest list must be disclosed publicly. This kind of reporting will ensure that Canadians have a more open and transparent fundraising system.

What is also interesting about Bill C-50 is that both Conservative Party members, and several newly independent members of this House, voted against this legislation, which, as I mentioned, would increase transparency in our political system. It is important to note that this also includes the member for Terrebonne, whose name is on the very bill we are now debating. He too voted against this important legislation improving our political system for Canadians.

The member for Terrebonne chose to bring Bill C-364 forward to the House. This bill would benefit wealthier donors by increasing their tax credits. As well, he and his colleagues voted against bringing greater transparency to fundraisers. These actions would move our democracy backward, not forward.

In addition to Bill C-50, the Minister of Democratic Institutions is also moving our democracy forward by ensuring more, and not fewer Canadians, have access to voting with as few barriers as possible. This is done through repealing elements of the previous government's so-called Fair Elections Act. We are also moving our democracy forward by focusing on protecting our democratic institutions from foreign influence in our elections.

In partnership with the Communications Security Establishment, we released a first-of-its-kind in the world report on cyber threats to our democracy. As technology changes and evolves, so must our efforts to defend from those wishing to disrupt our Canadian democracy.

To further move our democracy forward, the Prime Minister tasked the Minister of Democratic Institutions to examine and present options for a commission or commissioner to organize leaders' debates during federal elections. In support of that, the minister and I were happy to participate in cross-Canada meetings with stakeholders from the broadcast media, new media, civil society, and academia to listen to their views on this important issue.

Our government is focused on moving forward and not backward. We are focused on strengthening our democratic institutions. We are focused on matters that unite Canadians, and not on those that divide Canadians. For this reason, the government cannot support Bill C-364.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

We must ensure that the conditions are fair for political parties, and at the same time recognize that Canadians have a democratic right to actively participate in their democracy by means of reasonable contributions.

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Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first off, I want to say that I feel both privileged and embarrassed to speak to this bill.

I am embarrassed that such an important bill dealing with the very foundations of our democracy had to be introduced as a private member's bill, for which there is a limited amount of debate. There are few hours of debate, since there is no period for questions. We get just two hours of debate on such fundamental issues. Although my colleague from Terrebonne has done excellent work, I wish these issues would have been addressed by the government and that we would have had an adequate amount of time to debate them.

My colleagues have likely heard the saying that there is no stopping progress. That implies that things are always moving forward.

My colleagues have likely heard the saying that there is no stopping progress. That implies that things are always moving forward. However, I have to say that I agree with my wise colleague from Terrebonne here. When it comes to election financing, the best thing to do to move forward would likely be to take a step back, properly analyze the situation, and determine the basic principles that we want to put in place to ensure that our political financing system is fair and to prevent money from becoming the sinews of war and the driving force in decision making.

I would like to give a bit of background on the progression of our election financing act in order to see where we went wrong. Here are a few of the highlights. In 1874, there were no spending limits, but any expenditures had to be reported. In 1908, businesses were prohibited from contributing to election campaigns. That was a step in the right direction. In 1908, we had already recognized that companies had a lot more money than voters and could use that money to disproportionately influence the government's decisions.

In 1920, it became mandatory for candidates to reveal the name of donors and the amounts they contributed. That was good. There were no more secrets. The process was becoming more open. In 1974, the Election Expenses Act was passed. It required parties to limit their election spending and report the sources of the donations they received. Under the act, parties also became eligible to be reimbursed for some of their expenses. That is when the idea of public funding first came into play. If every party is reimbursed by the government for some of its election spending, then it is like each of us is contributing to the campaign of the others. That shows that public financing is important, because democracy comes at a cost. We often say that democracy is too important to let others take care of it.

Once again, unfortunately, just a few dozen MPs will be able to speak to this bill unless the majority of members of the House, and I really do not see why it could not be all members, agree to support this bill at second reading. That would allow us to properly study in committee not just the bill but also ways to improve it if stakeholders had suggestions.

I will continue with the history lesson. In 2002, measures were reintroduced to limit third-party spending, which, especially when it comes to advertising, can have a tremendous influence on an election result. I am going quickly because 10 minutes is really not enough

time to cover a topic. In 2003, strict rules for the transparency of party financing were implemented, and parties were required to submit a detailed report containing the names and addresses of all donors every year. In return, a per vote subsidy was introduced. At the time, it was \$1.75, adjusted for inflation. Private donations were capped at \$5,000 and up to 75% was tax deductible. Once again, we are talking about people like you and me, Mr. Speaker.

● (1755)

Naturally, I am more likely to support and donate to the campaigns of my NDP colleagues than to those of another party. However, when the government gives tax breaks to those who make contributions to political parties, my taxes are part of the reimbursement that they receive. That was already problematic. The parties get reimbursed for 50% of their election expenses.

In 2008, as we should all remember well, since it was just a short time ago, Mr. Harper had scarcely been elected when he announced that he would soon be abolishing this subsidy. This was a catastrophe. It signalled a move towards the U.S. system. Not that I am saying we are at that point, but we are heading in that direction. Money is everything in that system, and the wealthy automatically have more influence than people with a middle-class income—though we still do not know exactly what a middle-class income is—not to mention the poorest members of American society. It is utter nonsense, because the fundamental principle of democracy is one person, one vote, not one rich person influencing the votes of a certain number of people. It is one person, one vote, and each person's vote must matter equally.

Following that logic, maybe elections should be 100% publicly funded. Some people seem to think that Canadians may be proud of their democracy but are unable to understand that a democratic system like ours costs money. Divide that cost among the entire population and it is lower than if one person has to pay for it all, and most importantly, it is divided evenly in accordance with our tax rules. That is clearly not where the government went in recent years, which has had a definite influence on representation in the House.

It may be reasonable to think that parties that have been around longer have a leg up on start-up parties. I am not saying that a longer history is a good thing. There is a difference. When any party, no matter how small, gets a percentage of the popular vote but is not present in the House of Commons, that means there are two problems. One, our electoral system is flawed, and two, financing does not play a big enough role. If I understand my colleague from Terrebonne correctly, his bill would not only make political donations less influential but also restore per-vote funding.

If I choose to support a new party that has new ideas and wants to be heard, and some Canadians share its ideas, how can I move forward in the democratic system if, because of the electoral system, my vote is not recognized because this government decided to snub proportional representation when it realized that that would not serve its interests, and on top of that, the funding system does not allow me to support my party?

I have often used the example of a candidate from the Bloc Québécois or Parti Québécois who runs in Westmount, in Montreal. Right off the bat, his chances of being elected are pretty low, but he can still contribute to his party's agenda knowing that every vote he does get will help his party a little bit. This is an excellent idea, and we need to bring this back as soon as possible.

Time is running out and I will not have enough to share all of my ideas. We need to find the best way to increase citizen engagement as much as possible based on our electoral system and the associated political financing system.

● (1800)

In that sense, the bill introduced by my colleague from Terrebonne is a step in the right direction. I am pleased to support it and I hope to have the opportunity to debate it in committee.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise this afternoon to speak to the bill introduced by my colleague from Terrebonne. It is a noble bill that has to do with political party financing.

Our role here is to faithfully represent the public and our ridings. Are there some people who have more rights than others in a democracy? No. The basic principle, the fundamental principle, is that everyone has an equal voice. Unfortunately, a correlation has been observed between political party financing and the results the parties obtain. The system becomes distorted, and money wields greater influence.

The wealthiest people can decide to finance political parties, those able to form government in particular, in other words, the two main parties. This has happened in recent months and years, where people were given access to power at fundraising dinners or galas for \$1,500. Obviously, those donors expected something in return. That approach skews our democracy; it hijacks it. Under that type of system, those with more money have a greater say.

My colleague is suggesting that we reduce this type of financing and replace it with public funding. This bill is about restoring public funding, as my colleague from Trois-Rivières pointed out in his speech. We had this type of funding before, but it was abolished under the Harper regime.

Public funding was brought in under Jean Chrétien in response to the sponsorship scandal. Friends of the party were providing financing, and they then got a kickback in the form of contracts. That was the sponsorship scandal. Mr. Chrétien figured that he needed to save face, so he made the process a little more democratic. This is unfortunately how things sometimes work in our society. It takes a scandal for us to implement a more progressive measure or to improve our democracy.

Private Members' Business

My colleague is proposing that we bring back the principle of per-vote funding for existing parties. This is a wonderful principle. It is not the end of the world, nor is it a cure-all, but it would help get us back on track.

As my colleague from Trois-Rivières and my other colleagues were saying, we are looking at the principle. In the House, no one can justify voting against this bill at second reading because of the details. We are all open to the idea of improving the bill in committee, as we have said repeatedly during today's debate. That is the principle.

Our role as legislators is to pass good laws that improve democracy and reflect the desires of the people we represent. That is what we are talking about, and that is what we should aspire to. I cannot imagine anyone voting against this principle in good conscience today. If any Conservatives or Liberals vote against this bill, I can only deduce that they are doing it with an eye to the next election. We condemn cynicism in politics and the mediocre levels of trust in politicians. If any members vote against this bill on the pretext of having small details debated and improved in committee, I would not trust those members because they would have shown that what matters to them most is power. Anyone who votes against this bill is showing that all they care about is winning the next election and making sure their party stays strong thanks to financial contributions from the rich and powerful.

Tax havens are a good example. In their fine speeches, the Liberals say they are against them. The minister says the net is tightening, but in reality, nothing concrete is being done. The Liberals continue to legalize more and more tax havens. Does that really benefit the middle class and those working hard to join it, as the Liberals say? Not in the least.

If the business world and the banks on Bay Street in Toronto tell their friends to keep doing what they are doing and promise that in exchange, business people will get together and keep giving them \$1,500, that does not work.

● (1805)

That is not democracy. That is the opposite of democracy. It is financial dictatorship and that needs to change.

My colleague introduced a bill that is based on a meaningful principle and that represents a step in the right direction. In my opinion, this is a fundamental democratic principle. Everyone should be in favour of it. I can only assume that anyone who opposes it is acting in bad faith.

I would like to close by saying that we have spoken out against the \$1,500 dinners and against the Prime Minister accepting donations from people from Toronto and Vancouver and authorizing a bank for their cultural community in exchange for those donations. We spoke out against that. That is not the kind of system that we want. We want more objective principles.

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My colleagues and I are currently part of a group of independent parliamentarians. If this bill were to be passed tomorrow, we would not get a penny as a result. We are rising today on a matter of principle because we believe in a better democracy. We are here to defend values, not just personal interests, which seems to be the case for my colleagues opposite and my colleagues on this side. I encourage everyone to vote for my colleague's bill. As I said, we are at the principle stage. Improvements will be made to the bill in committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Terrebonne for his right of reply.

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, GPQ): I suppose it is more of a right to wrap it up, Mr. Speaker.

Does anyone know what percentage of Canadians support and have confidence in politicians and their promises? It is 3%. I am sure everyone will agree that the people are not exactly giving us top marks. There is definitely room for improvement when it comes to the bonds of trust between us and our constituents. We owe it to them to do better, that is for sure. People are expressing dissatisfaction to an alarming degree and are constantly saying that politicians are sellouts and power can be bought.

Now more than ever, we must ensure that we are beyond reproach, squeaky clean. That is why I am asking my colleagues to do everything they can to separate us as politicians from any appearance of conflict of interest related to money. I have heard some very good arguments in favour of that. We will be voting on the bill I had the honour of introducing, Bill C-364. The bill would restore public per-vote funding for all parties that receive at least 2% of the votes in an election, so it only applies to the serious ones.

However, the maximum amount for donations that can be collected by parties would be reduced from \$1,500 per person to a reasonable \$500. I am proud to introduce this bill because it serves the interests of the people who vote for me and for my colleagues. To be democratic is to put shared interests before personal interests. That is what I am asking some of my colleagues to do, but not all because some have already seen reason. I am asking those who are still having difficulty seeing the light. I am referring to the two major parties that take turns governing.

Public funding is fundamentally democratic. For every vote received, parties get a small amount of money to finance their activities. We are talking about just under \$2 a year, but this makes all the difference. Providing just under \$2 in stable and predictable funding for all political parties, from the largest to the smallest, tells people that, yes, it makes a difference when they vote for the party of their choice, no matter the polls and the political landscape of their riding. It tells people that their vote is added to the votes of all those who share their ideals, enabling the party of their choice to operate between election campaigns. It ensures that public debate is vigorous by allowing a plurality of votes and points of view. It also reduces that blight on democracy that is strategic voting, protest voting, or voting for the least objectionable candidate.

Let us work together to restore public funding for political parties. Let us restore it and finally put an end to the deplorable era of cash for access. Let us forget the \$1,500-a-head cocktail receptions, where those who can afford it pay for privileged access to decision-makers.

We are all members of Parliament, and we all know that politics involves costs. That is a part of politics. We all need to campaign, pay for our signs and offices, and buy our volunteers coffee now and then. We are not trying to take away the right of citizens to contribute financially to a party. We encourage people to donate if they can and want to.

Most families in Terrebonne, the riding I have the honour to represent, do not have \$1,500 to spend on meetings with politicians. I would go so far as to say that if families in my area had \$1,500 to spare, they would have no trouble thinking of all kinds of smart, sensible things to spend it on. They certainly would not spend it on lunch with a politician. Nor would I, for that matter. That kind of investment is made by people who have personal interests to promote, not by ordinary citizens.

I think the time has come to separate private interests from our democracy. In a way, what this bill does is nationalize our democracy, making sure that it works for all Quebeckers and all Canadians. Let's do the right thing together. Let's nationalize our democracy once and for all, and let's give the power back to the people.

• (1810)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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 (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 21, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Routine Proceedings

to problems of consistency and coherence in federal fiscal management.

Furthermore, as presented, it is challenging to determine the impact of this bill on federal revenue. Then there are the added costs of administering the tax credit and requisite certification process, along with amending the Income Tax Act.

Other shortcomings of the bill include its lack of an adequate accountability mechanism, and its exclusion of important conservation partners, such as not-for-profit entities, indigenous governments, and municipalities. To me, this lack of inclusivity is serious because it fails to acknowledge a fundamental truth about heritage conservation in our country: it is necessary for it to be a collaborative undertaking.

Bill C-323 was not designed in collaboration with other jurisdictions and partners, and does not properly take into account current conservation tools and approaches. The standing committee emphasizes that for conservation efforts to succeed, they must involve broad collaboration and engagement with other jurisdictions, indigenous groups, stakeholders, and partners.

Our heritage assets are certainly worthy of conservation, and we can and must do a better job of protecting them. To achieve this goal necessarily requires thoughtful, strategic collaboration. Financial measures can be an effective way to support heritage conservation, but only when carefully integrated into a broader framework.

Bill C-323 does not meet this test and does not merit the support of this House. I thank the members of the standing committee for their efforts and fully support the concurrence motion now before us.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House as the sponsor of Bill C-323, which had the potential to revitalize our heritage sector to preserve Canada's built heritage, something that has had erosion. We are very much a product of what has come before us. Our cities, the places where we live, our small communities are defined by the buildings that are there, but we have lost far too much over Canada's history.

Bill C-323 was a bipartisan effort that was worked on together with members of the Liberal Party and other parties to ensure that something that had been asked for and sought for years and years, and worked on by governments, Liberal and Conservative, behind the scenes, could finally come to fruition through a proper tax credit scheme that would allow for the preservation of our heritage buildings.

Our heritage buildings define communities. They create economic growth. They improve our quality of life. They build social capital. They give people a reason to appreciate where they are, to go to special places, and to make special places.

It is therefore very disappointing to see this report from the environment committee with regard to Bill C-323, particularly in view of the bipartisan support it had in the beginning.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1815)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(On the Order: Motions)

November 30, 2017—Mrs. Schulte (King—Vaughan)—That the Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development (recommendation not to proceed further with Bill C-323, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (rehabilitation of historic property)), presented on Thursday, November 30, 2017, be concurred in.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(2), the motion to concur in the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, recommendation not to proceed further with Bill C-323, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (rehabilitation of historic property), presented on Thursday, November 30, 2017, is deemed to be proposed.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to comment on the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development regarding Bill C-323.

The report is the result of the decision taken last year by this House to refer the bill to committee for further study. Bill C-323 proposes federal tax credits for investments in eligible projects to conserve privately owned heritage properties. During this period, the committee also undertook a robust study of heritage preservation and protection in Canada.

The committee's report, entitled "Preserving Canada's Heritage: The Foundation for Tomorrow", urges the Government of Canada to better protect and conserve this country's built heritage. Among its 17 recommendations, the report calls for the introduction of financial measures, enhanced federal leadership, and greater collaboration with indigenous peoples.

The Government of Canada welcomes both reports, and I fully support the concurrence motion now before us.

While the end goal of promoting heritage conservation is certainly worthy, the mechanism proposed in Bill C-323 suffers from several significant shortcomings. These shortcomings make it impossible for the standing committee, or for me, to support the proposed legislation.

The standing committee properly points out that Canada must do more to protect its built heritage. As the committee noted, financial incentives that encourage investment in the rehabilitation of historic properties and heritage places have much to offer. The committee, however, identifies many of the fundamental weaknesses in the mechanism proposed in Bill C-323. One such weakness is inherent in any tax changes undertaken outside of the regular budget process. As my hon. colleagues recognize, these types of changes often lead

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Initially, I worked with members of the Liberal Party and others to develop the bill and get it supported in the House of Commons. It would have created specific tax incentives on eligible heritage restoration work done to designated heritage buildings. Specifically, there would have been a 20% tax credit for rehabilitation and restoration work done to a designated heritage building. The work would have had to be certified by a registered architect. The bill would also have created an accelerated capital cost allowance for capital costs, again finding a way to create an incentive, with minimal cost to the public purse, for people to restore and preserve buildings instead of demolishing them.

In effect, the bill would have created a heritage policy for Canada that is fair to property owners, whom we in the public sector ask to bear the cost and burden of preserving our heritage through our process of designating their buildings and telling them that we want them saved, yet we do not provide anything on the other side to compensate them for those increased costs. This legislation would have created that impact, and it would have had a positive effect on Canada's national heritage.

The National Trust for Canada, our leading organization on built heritage, estimates that we have lost over 20% of our built heritage in the past 30 years, including buildings like the Edison Hotel in Toronto and the Redpath Mansion. For that reason, the national trust was strongly supportive, and it was one of the collaborative partners we worked with to develop this bill.

In fact, what the member said is entirely, patently untrue. There was enormous consultation with stakeholders, municipalities, etc. that went into the development of the bill. Through that process of consultation, it became evident that heritage means so much to many communities. It creates value for those communities and encourages tourism. It is something all Canadians can enjoy. That is why the bill had so much support.

What support did we have through the consultation? It was across political lines. It was across the nation. It was from individual members of Parliament, from dozens of historical societies, and dozens and dozens of municipalities. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities supported it. The royal society of architects supported it. Provincial governments supported it. I could go on and on.

The suggestion that it did not provide for collaboration with partners shows that whoever wrote that speech had no comprehension of the way heritage designation works, or the way the bill was crafted. In fact, it created a partnership that did not exist up until then among provinces, which set the terms for heritage preservation; municipalities, which make the decisions on which buildings to designate; and, finally, putting into the piece the federal partnership through the support for restoration. There could be nothing better than building a collaborative partnership. That is why I was so pleased to see that partnership build and the bill pass through second reading in the House, with support, it should be noted, from members of every party. It was not all the members of every party in the House, but members from every party in the House supported the bill, including several members of the Liberal Party.

At committee, a consensus emerged that mirrored the consensus across Canada that the bill would have a tremendous positive impact on our heritage built stock, and on the communities we live in. It

seemed that all members of the committee were quite supportive. This was evident in their comments and their questions for the witnesses.

• (1820)

The members heard a lot about tax credits elsewhere, including for example the one in the United States, which has had a huge impact in revitalizing inner cities, in creating economic activity, and in creating tourist attractions and hubs where they never were before.

The *Urban Land* Institute magazine showcases its best projects of the year. Every year it overwhelmingly shows projects that have at their heart the American version of this heritage tax credit. People saw that it was valuable.

Also in that study they learned that the costs were minimal. In fact, the likely impact on the fiscal framework federally was because of the incentive it created for restoration and the like, and the economic spinoffs and developments that happened. More than any of these other kinds of studies that give us dubious reports on economic impact, this impact would be positive and taxpayers would get far more back than they ever put out, as well as the significant public benefits that would have been derived.

Then something happened. Just before it came time for the committee to vote, the Prime Minister's Office cracked down on its MPs for speaking their minds at committee and for having the temerity to have voted as they saw fit at second reading. Many of them had personally worked on the bill at second reading and to get it through to committee. Despite all of their previous support, Liberal MPs were forced to vote down the bill at committee by the Prime Minister's Office against their will. I understand that one of them was virtually in tears.

Supporters of the bill were understandably disappointed to see the bill voted down. Bill C-323 was an opportunity to refocus our efforts on heritage preservation during the 150th anniversary of Confederation. The policy seemed ideal for the milestone year in our nation's history. Unfortunately, the committee made the decision that we are now considering today.

We heard that in the companion report there was, believe it or not, a recommendation for tax credits like this. However, the criticism was, as we just heard in the speech from the government, that it should be done through the normal budget process. This was the criticism levelled by critics, and that is what was in speeches previously.

This committee report was tabled last year. The budget process continued. The budget was this week. Anybody who suggested to we wait for the budget and the proper budget process misled supporters of the bill, supporters of heritage preservation. No such tax credit was forthcoming. No such policy was forthcoming. It simply did not exist. The story about a budget process was a mere excuse for a government being so miserly and short sighted that it would not allow the more visionary members of a caucus who saw the value in the bill to support it as they had at second reading.

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It is not surprising we see this from the Liberal government. I have been fond of noting that it seems to have a bit of a war on history. We saw it in the 150th anniversary of Confederation, where the themes disallowed the observance of the actual event of Confederation or events that celebrated our history. The five themes that were selected were fine, but if we wanted to have any support or assistance or to be part of the federal government's Canada 150 festivities, history and Confederation were not allowed.

This is just one of many examples of how the Liberal government has continued and perpetuated that war on Canadian history.

There was the cancellation of the Canada 150 medals for those people in local historical societies who do so much to build their communities. All of a sudden the opportunity to recognize people like that, people who build Canada, was wiped out. Why? Because the government is committed to a war on history.

There is an American great author who said, "History is who we are and why we are the way we are." We are losing that here.

There was a great Canadian historian and author with great influence, Canon Lionel Groulx, who said:

No, a nation cannot separate itself from its past any more than a river can separate itself from its source, or sap from the soil whence it arises. No generation is self-sufficient. It can and does happen that a generation does forget its history, or turns its back upon it; such an action is a betrayal of history.

● (1825)

Then of course there was the great Joseph Howe, who resisted Confederation 150 years ago. He then embraced it, and joined the cabinet of Sir John A. Macdonald later. He noted:

A wise nation preserves its records, gathers up its mementoes, decorates tombs of its illustrious dead, repairs great public structures and fosters national pride and love of country by perpetual reference to sacrifices and glories of the past.

That was Joseph Howe in 1871. That is what Bill C-323 would do, and that is why I still encourage some within the Liberal Party to have the courage and conviction to support it, and to reject this report from the committee to turn down Bill C-323.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for York—Simcoe for introducing this private member's bill.

Canadians take great pride in their built heritage, as they do in their diverse culture and history. Bill C-323 would provide Canadians with a much needed tax credit to assist them in repairing and maintaining heritage buildings. I have spoken with many constituents in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, and the bill is very welcomed there. We have many heritage homes and other buildings, and repairing them can be very expensive.

Recently, I had the privilege of sitting on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development while we studied this bill. At the same time, the committee also looked at the state of federal funding and management of national heritage. Along with other members of the committee, I learned a great deal. I learned that between 2003 and 2006, the federal government offered financial incentives for the restoration of commercial buildings.

Over three years, the commercial heritage properties incentive fund contributed \$15 million for this purpose. The economic impact of the fund was \$143.4 million in restoration work, a sound

investment, and in fact, almost a ten to one return on government investment. While the committee examined many heritage concerns, I will focus on the testimony and recommendations about built heritage because they speak directly to the issues we are considering here with Bill C-323.

The committee heard from Ms. Natalie Bull, executive director of the National Trust for Canada. Ms. Bull said:

Why would a parliamentary committee be concerned with the state of historic places in Canada? I think there are lots of great reasons. For a start, there is the potential for positive impacts on climate change. Canada's buildings are the third-largest greenhouse gas emitting sector, and the reuse and renewal of heritage buildings capitalizes on materials and energy already invested, reduces construction and demolition waste, and avoids the environmental impact associated with new development.

In addition to climate change benefits, historic places can contribute to a strong economy. Rehabilitation projects generate up to 21% more jobs than the same investment in new construction. They're a great stimulus measure, and they typically use local labour and materials, such that 75% of the economic benefits of heritage rehabilitation projects tend to remain in the communities where these buildings are located.

More jobs, action on climate change, and reduced waste all seem like excellent reasons to support Bill C-323. It would have been great for the government to have included funding for this in its budget released earlier this week.

Personally, I was very disappointed that there was no money in the government's 2018-2019 budget to fund a national home energy retrofit program across Canada for homes in general and nothing for heritage homes either.

Mr. Chris Wiebe, the manager of heritage policy and government relations at the National Trust, reiterated the organization's support for this legislation. He said:

First, we would recommend implementation of a federal heritage rehabilitation tax incentive, such as the measures recently proposed in Bill C-323. That is a proven way to attract private and corporate investment to privately owned historic places and to give them vibrant new uses. Two, the government could consider extending a rehabilitation tax credit to heritage homeowners to get even more impact. Three, federal investment in seed funding for creative financing mechanisms like crowdfunding could help many more charities and not-for-profits attract private donations and would save and renew some of the thousands of other heritage buildings that make up the fabric of our communities. Finally, an increase in federal cost-shared funding available for the national historic sites heritage places program would help turn the tide of neglect for these important national icons as well.

While Bill C-323 would not answer all of these questions, it would be a good start toward supporting Canadian heritage. In fact, when the environment and sustainable development committee, which I sat on, made its recommendations to the House of Commons on these matters, it spoke directly to the need for a tax credit. The committee tabled its 10th report entitled "Preserving Canada's Heritage: the Foundation for Tomorrow", in December 2017, just two short months ago. Recommendation no. 11 of that report said:

The Committee recommends that the federal government establish a tax credit for the restoration and preservation of buildings listed on the Canadian Register of Historic Places.

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●(1830)

That would appear to be a slam dunk for Bill C-323. The committee recommends a tax credit for heritage building restoration and preservation. A bill comes before the committee that does exactly that, yet the Liberals on the committee went against their own recommendations and voted to kill the legislation. They forced through a report that recommended that the House stop dealing with Bill C-323. If those members of Parliament received anywhere near as much correspondence supporting the bill as I did, I have to say that their constituents will be very disappointed. Still, we have a chance to pass the proposed legislation at third reading, and I call upon all members of the House to support it.

Members may be interested in knowing what else the committee recommended on the issue of built heritage. Recommendation 12 of the report says:

The Committee recommends that the federal government, in co-operation with provincial and territorial governments, work to adapt future versions of Canada's National Model Building Codes in a manner that will facilitate the restoration and the rehabilitation of existing buildings and the preservation of their heritage characteristics.

This is important, because old buildings do not easily adapt to new building codes. One example, given by Mr. Robert Eisenberg at York Heritage Properties, is that adding insulation to the roofs of older buildings increases snow load in the winter because heat no longer escapes through the roof to melt the snow, thus threatening the building's structural integrity.

The committee spent time looking at issues specific to rural areas, like my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, resulting in recommendation 13, which reads:

The Committee recommends that Parks Canada review its National Cost-Sharing Program and, if it is determined that rural sites are under-represented in applications for funding or in the awarding of funding, steps should be taken to improve the program.

Rural areas have specific struggles when it comes to preserving heritage buildings. In particular, there is sometimes a lack of specialized craftspeople and specialty materials available locally, and the cost to bring them in from bigger cities is prohibitive. That is why heritage buildings in many rural areas are left to fall into neglect. I am very fortunate in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia to have a number of very skilled tradespeople who are ready, willing, and able to rehabilitate heritage homes.

While recommendation 13 did not address the need for a tax credit directly, it is clear that the passage of Bill C-323 would be particularly valuable in rural areas like mine. Finally, heritage building owners would be able to afford the additional expenses required to restore these important buildings.

I wish to finish my remarks today by reading from a January 2017 letter I received from the City of Nelson that asked me to support Bill C-323. The City of Nelson said that these tax measures could transform the economic fundamentals for renewing historic places and encourage building conservation of every size and type, from landmark commercial buildings to modest homes.

I agree and that is why we will be voting in support of Bill C-323.

●(1835)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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 Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(2), the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 21, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

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A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

HOUSING

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to discuss the answer and to revisit the question I asked in November, when I asked the government about media reports of a new building code. I pointed out then that under the current government, the dream of home ownership had become increasingly out of reach for many Canadians, particularly young Canadians. This is a function of many things, which include rising prices and the restrictions on access to credit that have taken place under the government's watch, but this new building code would become a further barrier to home ownership, as it is something that would have the potential to drive up costs.

The answer I received that day was unsatisfactory, like many other answers members of the government and the parliamentary secretaries give, when they congratulate themselves and pat themselves on the back. It talked about the low carbon economy fund and the benefits of efficient buildings, which is all well and good.

However, the main problem with this new code, as was reported then, is the business of the requirement for compliance at life-cycle events for a building. Many consumers who heard about this at the time were concerned. I know that my colleague, the member for Banff—Airdrie, has also raised questions about this. The concern is about the marketability of a property and the requirement reported at that time that a homeowner would be obligated to ensure compliance with this new building code at a life-cycle event, such as the sale of the property.

For seniors, in particular, who come to the time in life when they no longer wish to occupy the home that perhaps they raised their families in and who would maybe have older homes to suddenly be confronted with the cost of compliance with a new code would be troubling. The member for Kootenay—Columbia, in the debate on the previous bill, mentioned the difficulty and expense of retrofitting a building.

The energy efficiency of a building is part of its market value. People will pay for an efficient home. Efficiency creates its own incentives. No one wants to pay more to heat a home, and there are many built-in incentives in having an efficient home.

I was concerned about the answer I received then, and I remain concerned about the government's direction with this new building code. We are concerned about how they are going to compel provinces to comply and compel existing homeowners to comply, which is probably the most troubling part of this new building code, as it was reported last fall.

● (1840)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite's continued interest in this very important issue.

Our government is serious about tackling climate change, and doing so in ways that best serve Canadians. That is why our government is working in collaboration with the provinces and territories to develop a new model code for existing buildings and homes by 2022. It is part of the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change, and the buildings strategy adopted by federal, provincial, and territorial energy ministers just last year. It is supported by the \$182 million we included in budget 2017 to improve energy efficiency in existing buildings and encourage the construction of new net-zero energy buildings across the country.

Canadians understand the benefits of such efforts. They recognize that making their homes more energy efficient will result in lower monthly utility bills, improved comfort, and a higher resale value down the road. Through the Generation Energy dialogue, we asked Canadians to imagine their energy future. It is clear that Canadians want to take action on energy efficiency as part of the transition to a low-carbon energy future. Provinces, territories, and G20 member countries are also moving in this direction. However, none of this will happen overnight. Instead, we are signalling our intentions to the market so that there is plenty of time to adjust and adapt.

Our country's history with furnaces is a good example of how well this approach works. The price of residential gas furnaces dropped 30% between 2000 and 2010, because the market had plenty of lead time before new regulations were finalized. That is why we are also working with the building industry to lower energy

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and construction costs through innovative research, development, and demonstration projects. That is why we are investing in new building technologies that will bring costs down even more for consumers.

This is a five-year process that explicitly considers cost-effectiveness and affordability. It is a process that is both evidence-based and consensus-driven. It is a process built around industry-wide consultations, regional representation, and plenty of opportunities for public input well in advance of the new codes being published. This is how it should be, a truly national exercise that is led by the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes, that respects provincial and territorial jurisdiction over how new homes and buildings are constructed, and that supports partners in the building industry to come up with solutions that work for Canadians.

I am not sure why the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge is opposed to any of that. The energy we use to power, heat, and cool our homes and buildings accounts for 17% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. Why is the member opposite opposed to finding cost-effective ways to reduce that, especially since as much as 75% of the buildings in Canada today will still be in use in 2030? It just makes sense to make them as energy efficient as is possible, reasonable, and practical, and we are doing this by working with all Canadians.

● (1845)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member did not quite understand the question or the nature of my concern, because I am certainly not opposed to or have any problem at all with the goal of efficiency, far from it. I think any homeowner wants a home that is heat-efficient. That is certainly not a problem at all.

The problem, which the member did not address in her response to my question tonight, nor did she respond to or address it when this issue was raised in the House by both me and the member for Banff—Airdrie, is the portion of the proposal that deals with compulsion at life-cycle events in the building, in particular, a sale of the property. This is the portion of what had been reported then that caused the most concern. It was compelling—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, a clean energy future is not just a nice-to-have. It is a must-have. That is why we are investing in clean technology and innovations that support both economic prosperity and environmental protection.

Energy efficiency is an important part of that equation. It has to be when the building sector is a significant contributor to Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. The transition to a low-carbon economy demands that we ensure new and existing buildings are more efficient.

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We will continue to work with all Canadians to find innovative solutions that also happen to help homeowners save money on their energy bills and increase the health, comfort, and resale value of their homes.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to talk about a question I asked last year on Bill C-58.

Just so the citizens of North Island—Powell River, who I am proud to represent, know what we are talking about, I am going to repeat the question. The minister keeps repeating that his government is the first in 30 years to make improvements to access to information. However, the Information Commissioner was very clear when she said that the Liberals' Bill C-58 is regressive and that the status quo would be better than what they are proposing, meaning that Stephen Harper's government was more open and accountable than the current government. Canadians were promised more accountability and transparency. Will the government work with us to help it actually keep that election promise?

This is a very important question. The constituents I talked to across my riding spoke passionately about their concerns around Bill C-51 from the last government, and about wanting to make sure things were transparent. The President of the Treasury Board said that we are reaching a new bar, and this is absolutely not the truth. It is important we remember who the expert is in this, and that is the Information Commissioner, who said, "I would much prefer to keep the status quo."

This is incredibly important to my constituents. This is about the transparency of government. It is about making sure information is accessible. We know so many issues have come to light because Canadians, journalists, and NGOs use access to information to ask important questions that deserve answers. I do not understand why the government created a bill that really just blocks this.

Let us look at the facts. Residential school survivors fighting the government for decades for acknowledgement of the terrible and horrific abuse they faced, the reality that type 1 diabetes in Canada is now being rejected, the under-reporting of sexual assaults in Canada, Afghan detainees and those horrendous stories we heard, these were all discovered by the access to information that this bill totally erases. That is horrendous in this day and age.

One of the most concerning things for me is the fact that the bill talks about people who may be vexatious. What may appear to the government as vexatious may be of the utmost interest for Canadians. Who gets to decide what that is? How do Canadians appeal the decision by a department? This is really important. I know the people of North Island—Powell River are very concerned. They want to know we have information and have access to it, and that journalists have access to it, so that we can learn what is happening in this country. This completely bars the way. We really need to take a moment to reflect on that.

At this point, the bill has passed through the House, but this is leading to something that will be an ever-growing concern. When the government talks about increased transparency and when it says that the PM's office can be talked to now and people can ask for

information, that is simply not true. When the Information Commissioner is saying that what we have now, which was in much need of change, is better than what is being proposed, all Canadians need to stand up and take notice of what is happening.

That is why I am here today, and I think we all must focus on this. Whoever is in government has tremendous power. It must be held in check. That is what democracy is all about.

• (1850)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for this opportunity to speak to Bill C-58.

Bill C-58 is guided by the principle that government information belongs to the people it serves. It advances the original intent of the act in a way that reflects today's technologies, policies, and legislation. It does this by kicking off a progressive, ongoing renewal of the AT system, one that will protect Canadians' right of access to government information well into the future. It does this by adding a new part of the act relating to proactive disclosure, one that puts into practice the idea of "open by default".

The proactive disclosure system will apply to more than 240 departments, agencies, and crown corporations, including the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices, senators and members of Parliament, institutions that support Parliament, administrative institutions that support the courts, and over 1,100 judges of the superior courts.

We will also be putting into law the proactive publication of information that is known to be of high interest to Canadians, information that provides greater transparency and accountability for the use of public funds. These include travel and hospitality expenses for ministers and their staff, and senior officials across government. I was happy to hear that the member was talking about the concerns her constituency has. I am sure they will be happy to know that finally the NDP joined our government in the proactive disclosure of expenses. It took a while but we are happy they are on board with us.

Contracts over \$10,000, and all contracts of MPs and senators will also be included, as well as all grants and contributions over \$25,000; mandate letters and revised mandate letters; briefing packages for new ministers and deputy ministers; lists of briefing notes for the minister or deputy minister; and the briefing binders prepared for question period and parliamentary committee appearances. Departments will also regularly review the information being requested under the act to help us understand and increase the kinds of information that could be proactively disclosed.

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We will also strengthen the request-based side of the system by developing a guide to provide requesters with clear explanations for exemptions and exclusions, investing in tools to make processing information requests more efficient, allowing federal institutions with the same minister to share request processing services for greater efficiency, and increasing government training to get common and consistent interpretation and application of the ATI rules.

We are also following the guidance of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. We are moving to help government institutions weed out bad faith requests that put a significant strain on the system. By tying up government resources, such vexatious requests can interfere with an institution's ability to do its other work and to respond to other requests. We need to get this right and recognize that while this new tool is needed to significantly improve the system, everything from sound policy to training to proper oversight must be done to prevent its abuse.

In addition, the proposed legislation gives the Information Commissioner new powers, including the power to order the release of government records. This is an important advancement that was first recommended by a parliamentary committee studying the Access to Information Act in 1987. Our government is acting on it and Bill C-58 will change the commissioner's role from an ombudsperson to an authority with the power to order the release of government records.

After 34 years, Canada's ATI system needs updating—

• (1855)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member North Island—Powell River.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I am just so disappointed. One of the realities is that there were many amendments given forth to this committee, some really meaningful ones. When we talk about a government that made a lot of promises about working across this aisle, about collaboration, we absolutely did not see that.

I just have to go back to the vexatious part. Who decides this? Allowing a department to decide what is vexatious to them could be something fundamentally important to Canadians, so who gets to decide that? That is what I am hoping this member will answer. Who gets to decide and what is the appeal process so that citizens of this country have a right to have their questions answered?

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are proud to be the first government in over 30 years to make substantial improvements to the Access to Information Act. We understand that more must be done, which is why Bill C-58 includes a mandatory review of the act every five years, the first review beginning no later than one year after the bill receives royal assent.

Let us be clear, Bill C-58, for the first time in 34 years, gives the Information Commissioner order-making powers. That is an advancement. For the first time ever, the act applies to the minister's offices and to the PMO. That is an advancement. For the first time ever, the act applies to 240 federal entities from the courts to the ports. That is also an advancement.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last November I asked the government what it would do to support the small-scale outdoor farmers who are producing cannabis for recreational use.

Increasingly we see large corporations quickly taking the lead in getting licences to produce marijuana, companies like Tweed Main Street, founded by Liberal Party CFO Chuck Rifici; National Green BioMed, whose chairman is former Liberal cabinet minister Herb Dhaliwal; and Hydropharmacy Corporation, whose VP used to be the Liberal health minister in B.C. They are all quickly expanding to meet the government's timetable. At the same time, new producers and small producers, like people in my riding, are being locked out.

Last week I met with Lesli Lancaster, the owner of Kootenay Marijuana Company, a new company in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, who wants to produce marijuana for medicinal and recreational use. Lesli wants to run a legal, above-board company and is trying to raise the capital required for the licensing process.

The licensing process is lengthy and expensive and requires that the facility be developed as the licensing progresses. This means that companies need to have their capital in place before they can become fully licensed. Lesli went to the Bank of Montreal to open an account so she could start raising the capital needed for the licensing and development process. Guess what? The bank informed her, “We need an approval from Health Canada before we can set up an account. I'm aware that you can't get the approval yet due to Health Canada's capital constraints, and this really puts you between a rock and a hard place.”

Let us go over that again. Lesli cannot get a licence because she does not have enough capital, and she cannot raise capital until she has a licence. That is pretty much the classic definition of a catch-22. I should mention that Lesli is a business consultant and bookkeeper and counts a number of potential marijuana farmers among her clients. She told me that many of them are enduring similar frustrations.

At the same time Lesli is struggling to overcome seemingly impossible federal government restrictions, a number of small marijuana growers in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia have banded together to form a co-op. They wrote me this week asking that I share their concerns with the Prime Minister. Their concern is that new licences will not be available until Canada's legalization becomes law. However, outdoor producers will miss the May 1 planting deadline and will not have any product for sale until November 2019, a full 16 months after legalization.

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It is uncertain if the government will even license the outdoor production of cannabis. This government talks about the importance of legal production, but it is doing everything possible to prevent small rural producers from working within the law. These are businesses that want to operate within the law. They want full accountability, appropriate licensing, and to be part of Canada's new legal marijuana regime. However, they are being prevented at every turn while big pot corners the market. This is truly an example of the inequality that is pervasive in Canada. The wealthy get richer; working class people and small businesses get left behind.

When will the government take action to help small marijuana farms and outdoor growers instead of continuing to push them back into the shadows? They are not going away, and neither am I.

● (1900)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first express my personal gratitude that the member is going to stick around.

I would like to thank the member for Kootenay—Columbia for giving me the opportunity to speak to our government's approach to legalizing and regulating cannabis.

The regulatory approach that our government proposes prioritizes the health and safety of all Canadians while enabling a regulated industry to produce quality-controlled cannabis for controlled distribution and sale by provincial and territorial governments.

Federal oversight is absolutely key to ensuring all Canadians have the assurance that licensed producers would be subject to the same quality standards and requirements from coast to coast to coast.

Under the proposed approach, all licensed producers, no matter where they are located, must meet rigorous national standards for quality and safety, physical security, personnel vetting, record keeping, and inventory control. They would be subject to clear and consistent regulatory requirements for good production practices and product testing. They would also be subject to rigorous federal inspections to verify and enforce compliance with these requirements.

Our government's proposed approach has always prioritized the health and safety of Canadians by enabling a nationally regulated industry that produces legal and quality-controlled cannabis. Let me explain briefly why that is important.

It is absolutely important to the health and safety of Canadians that what is available for legal purchase by adult Canadian consumers must first of all be of known potency. There is a great deal of confusion in the criminal supply of cannabis currently available to consumers in that quite often, consumers do not know the potency of what they are taking. Therefore, in order to enable and assist them in making healthier, safer, and more socially responsible choices, they have to know the potency of what they are consuming. It is also critical that they can be assured of its purity, that it does not contain dangerous chemicals, such as fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, and other substances unfit for human consumption.

Finally, our regulated approach allows the consumer to know the provenance of the cannabis that is available for sale. Protecting

public health is an overarching policy objective, but I want to assure the member opposite it is not the only one. The government is also committed to using licensing and production controls to encourage a diverse, competitive market to create an environment where different types of producers, large and small, can participate and succeed.

On November 21, shortly after the day the member asked his question, our government published a detailed consultation paper that outlined a proposed approach for regulating production and sought input on a diverse range of issues, including the licensing, cultivation, and processing of cannabis.

The proposed approach is a clear expression of the government's objective to enable a diverse, competitive legal industry comprised of both large and small players in regions right across this country. The proposed approach would establish different classes of licences, including the creation of new micro-cultivation and microprocessing licences, craft licences, if you will, that would allow smaller producers to enter the legal cannabis market.

During the consultations, our government heard the views of all interested stakeholders, including prospective entrants into this new market, on the regulatory framework that will define what this new licensing approach would mean in practice and how it would operate to allow for a vibrant and diversified marketplace.

Health Canada is currently considering the input it has received. We made a commitment to publish a summary of the comments received and that report will be available in the next few weeks. In the meantime, our government will continue to work with potential applicants, large and small, to ensure they have the information and support they need to apply for a production licence.

Just by way of update, I also want to inform the member that we currently have over 200 licence applications in the final stage of review right across the country. We are very confident of the work of Health Canada in approving those licences. The approval of those licences is not a political process. It is done entirely independent of political interference or involvement.

● (1905)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, when the parliamentary secretary says there is no political interference, sometimes by setting guidelines that will not work for small growers or outdoor growers, we are in essence providing political interference through a set of standards.

In terms of measuring what is in the crop, that is easily handled afterward before it goes to market. The potency can be checked absolutely after a crop is grown and before it is sold on a commercial basis.

I still am concerned. Of the 200 licences, I am wondering if the member knows how many are actually from small, rural farmers or growers and what the government intends to do to make sure there is still a future for these small, rural outdoor farmers who want to be a legal part of the future recreational use of marijuana.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I will abandon my prepared remarks, and speak very specifically to the member's question. I want to assure him there are approximately 90 licences that have been approved. The overwhelming majority of licences that have been approved by Health Canada, for the licensed production of cannabis, are for small businesses that employ fewer than 100 employees, and are therefore defined as small businesses.

They are located in rural communities, and in communities where that is making a real difference for producing jobs and economic opportunity in different parts of the country. Therefore, there are no barriers to those small participants in entering into the system.

With the new regulations, and we will be coming forward with an update on the feedback we received in our consultations, we also propose to introduce a licence for smaller craft producers, what we refer to as a micro-producer or micro-processor. That would enable the even smaller participant to enter into this business and create that opportunity.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:08 p.m.)

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