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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, entitled “Broadband Connectivity in Rural Canada: Overcoming the Digital Divide”, in relation to the motion adopted on Tuesday, March 27. I am also proud to announce that it is a unanimous report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC) moved:

That the report of the Ethics Commissioner, entitled “The Trudeau Report”, tabled on Monday, January 29, 2018, be concurred in.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

I am rising today to speak to the former ethics commissioner's report called “The Trudeau Report”, which found that the Prime Minister had breached the Conflict of Interest Act in four separate ways.

Regrettably, at this point, I have just 10 minutes to speak, even though there is so much to be said. Let me start by summarizing why we are here and what has happened to get us to this point.

Two Christmases ago, right after the election, Christmas holidays were here and the Prime Minister dropped off the radar. This was a Prime Minister who had just been elected on a campaign of openness and transparency, but he left for somewhere and would not tell anyone where he went. If he had just been away on a holiday, maybe

on a beach somewhere, he probably would have told the media and Canadians that he was on a holiday with his family, but for some reason he was incredibly secretive and did not want anyone to know where he had gone on his Christmas holiday.

Some enterprising members of the parliamentary press gallery tracked down the Prime Minister and found out he was in the Bahamas. No doubt egged on by the Prime Minister's secrecy over the whole thing, these journalists kept digging. It turned out the Prime Minister was not just in the Bahamas at a resort somewhere that he had paid for, having a little holiday with his family. He was hanging out on a billionaire's beautiful island, a private Caribbean island owned by the Aga Khan.

The Aga Khan does some very good work. He presides over organizations such as the Global Centre for Pluralism, which has had associations and dealings, financial and otherwise, with the Government of Canada for decades. Again, the Aga Khan does very good work in Canada and around the world, but that is irrelevant to the point we are discussing today. The point is that the Aga Khan, a good individual who does very good work for Canadians, gets a whole lot of money from the Government of Canada to do this work, and the Prime Minister of Canada was on his island accepting a free vacation from him.

What the report told us is that this was not the first time the Prime Minister had taken a free vacation from the Aga Khan on the island. In fact, during Christmas 2014, prior to being Prime Minister, he was there for a holiday. In March 2016, family members were there for a holiday. Then during Christmas 2016, there was the private island holiday yet again. Wow, what an amazing so-called friendship to have. That is the other interesting thing about the report. For a year, the Prime Minister was saying that this was a holiday accepted from a very good friend, but the Ethics Commissioner's report told us that in fact they had not had contact for 30 years. He just seemed to be a wonderful, long-lost old friend whom the Prime Minister was somehow reacquainted with after he became Prime Minister, while the Aga Khan was doing a whole bunch of business with the Government of Canada.

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The point is, and that is most likely why the Prime Minister and his staff took such a posture of great secrecy, that we have ethics rules in place that are meant to prevent prime ministers, ministers, or even parliamentarians without executive responsibilities from doing things that put them in a conflict of interest. These are things like accepting free vacations from those who do multi-million dollar transactions with the government, accepting free rides in their private helicopters, not recusing oneself from discussions where the opportunity exists to improperly further the other person's interests, and failing to arrange one's own affairs in a manner to avoid those conflicts of interest. Those were the exact four areas where the Prime Minister broke the ethics rules. These rules are in place to stop a prime minister from doing this, but in a very shameful, historic ruling, we have seen our own Prime Minister break these four specific rules.

• (1010)

That is why my hon. friend the leader of the official opposition wrote to Mary Dawson, the then Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, asking for an investigation of the Prime Minister's conduct. That is why the Ethics Commissioner in turn conducted an investigation and produced a thorough 66-page report called "The Trudeau Report" on the Prime Minister's vacation. That is why the Ethics Commissioner reported her findings that the Conflict of Interest Act had been violated in four separate ways.

Let us keep in mind that the Conflict of Interest Act is a law. For anybody who said that the Prime Minister did not break the law, he did in fact break the law. The Conflict of Interest Act is a piece of legislation that our government brought into effect. It was passed here in the House of Commons. It is in law, and the Prime Minister broke that law. There is no way to sugarcoat or whitewash it. Mary Dawson's investigation confirmed what any sensible and reasonable observer would have said, that the Prime Minister's free luxury vacation on a private Caribbean island owned by someone with dealings with the federal government simply did not pass the sniff test.

Many have looked at the value of these three vacations. They are probably valued at close to \$700,000. When we look at the value of not only the vacation itself but the RCMP time that was used for this vacation, which the Prime Minister has refused to pay back, it is close to \$700,000. Can members imagine a minister of the crown receiving an envelope of cash with \$700,000 in it from somebody who is dealing with that minister? It is like that individual saying, "Here is a free gift of \$700,000 cash", when that minister is making decisions regarding the work this individual was doing. The fact that this is basically what our Prime Minister did is reprehensible. The fact that he refuses to take responsibility for it is even more irresponsible. It goes to show how the Prime Minister has failed Canadians in his dealings. He has been unethical and has shown such horrendous judgment time and time again.

The Ethics Commissioner also unearthed that the Prime Minister and his family accepted similar vacations when he was the leader of the third party, and that his wife, children, and their whole host of friends accepted a third vacation in March 2016.

We thank the former Ethics Commissioner for her work and her analysis on this serious issue. The report and the public discussions

about it have exposed a serious concern for us as Conservatives and I think for the entire House of Commons.

When we read the report that addressed the unethical and illegal vacation, we learned that during this Caribbean sojourn, the Prime Minister and the Aga Khan exchanged gifts. He received a present during a gifted vacation. Talk about piling it on. It is kind of like the nesting dolls that get piled on one after the other. We keep opening up the doll and there is another doll and then another. However, this is not very dollish at all; in fact, it is probably the opposite.

What kind of gifts are we talking about? My colleague, the hon. member for Saskatoon—Grasswood, himself a skilled journalist, sought to get to the bottom of the mystery and placed a question on the Order Paper to find out what kind of gifts the Prime Minister received from the Aga Khan. It would seem that the same PMO staff who first handled the communication of the Bahamas trip fielded this question. This is what we heard back from the government: basically, no disclosure. The Prime Minister said that he had disclosed all gifts to the Ethics Commissioner as part of the examination.

The bottom line is that the Prime Minister did not disclose the illegal gifts. He said he received a bag. We do not know if it was a duffle bag that one might get at Winners or a Louis Vuitton bag worth many thousands of dollars. We do not know because the Prime Minister will not tell us. The Prime Minister has to disclose gifts under a certain amount, but these illegal gifts that he received he has not had to disclose. When we have asked him time and time again, he has refused to.

The concern in this legal gap is not Mary Dawson's fault and it is something that needs to be addressed in the Conflict of Interest Code. With that, we need to get to the bottom of the gift exchange, and we need to close the loophole so that this does not continue.

• (1015)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed in the official opposition in the sense that what is really important to Canadians is what is happening in their everyday lives in communities across our country.

The Prime Minister has complied with the commissioner. Mary Dawson did an outstanding job looking into the matter. We responded. We appreciated the fine work Mary Dawson did, and we continue to want to move on and recognize what is important to Canadians.

On the one hand, we can see that Canada's middle class continues to grow and get healthier, which gives us more strength in our economy. We see some of the tangible examples, such as the hundreds of thousands of jobs that have been created and some of the social programming that has been put forward.

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As this government has focused on what Canadians want the government to do, the opposition has continued its preoccupation with character assassination, whether it is the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, or anyone else they believe they can point a finger at and say is a bad person. They can continue those personal assassinations. We, on the other hand, will continue to fight for the middle class and those aspiring to be part of it and those who are being challenged.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, what Canadians have seen for the last two years is a Prime Minister who continues to fail them. He made promises during the campaign, and when he was elected, he abdicated and reneged on every single one of those promises. We have never in the history of this Parliament seen a Prime Minister convicted of breaking four ethics laws.

The Prime Minister, and the Minister of Finance as well, are increasing taxes on Canadians, failing our energy sector, and failing the men and women in Canada who work in our natural resources sector who do not have Aga Khan billionaire friends to give them free island vacations worth \$700,000. Canadians are working hard every day. They do not have two full-time nannies paid for by the taxpayers. They do not have trips abroad where, thankfully, they are being fools, like the Prime Minister made a fool of himself on the India trip.

The Prime Minister is using Canadian taxpayers' dollars. He is using his position to advance himself. He is using his position to promote himself. Canadians are saying that it is time the Prime Minister stopped acting like a fool.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing up this very important issue.

The reality is that in the last election, the Liberals said that they were going to do things differently, that there was going to be more transparency, that there was going to be more accountability. However, what we are seeing is a serious loophole, which is that when they are given illegal gifts, they do not have to report them.

I think we have to come back to the basics here of accountability to Canadians. We have to stop having government members trying to say that everyday Canadians are interested in other things besides this. This is about the ethics of the leader of our country.

I would ask the member to talk a little bit about why this loophole is so huge and why the government is not taking steps to close it.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, I think we have seen a pattern with the government. Its members seem to find every loophole they can so they can use them to their advantage. We saw them do this very early on after the election, when the ministers were doing fundraisers with stakeholders. They were raising hundreds of thousands of dollars with the very same people they were working with in their ministerial portfolios. This was after the Prime Minister had said that they should be arranging their affairs in a manner that could bear the strongest scrutiny. They said that there were no rules that forbade them from doing that. We asked why they were not obeying not just the letter of the law but the spirit of the law. Honestly, if the Liberals would just follow the spirit of the law of the Ethics Commissioner's request, we would not have this problem.

If we did not have a Prime Minister who thinks he is entitled to all the fancy holidays and everything paid for by taxpayers, and anyone else he can take advantage of, we would not have this problem. However, we have the same old Liberals in government who are constantly trying to advance their own interests. Yes, we have to close this loophole to ensure that the Liberals do not find ways to take advantage of these kinds of things.

• (1020)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the opposition House leader for concurring in this report and basically presenting the case for why it is important to have debate today on the Prime Minister's ethical breaches. It is not just us saying it. It is the Ethics Commissioner saying it.

Before I go on, Madam Speaker, if I could have your help on this, I will move an amendment to the motion at the end of my speech. If I am given the warning of one minute, I will be happy to move it then.

We are here today because of what's called "The Trudeau Report". It was made under the Conflict of Interest Act and the Conflict of Interest Code for members of the House of Commons. It was tabled before the House in late January. Within it, we found that the Prime Minister, in fact, was guilty of breaking the ethical standards set in law.

It is not a spirit thing. It is not something the opposition would like to see. It is not something that members outside of the House believe is important. It is literally an act of Parliament that was passed, with guidance documents, which the Prime Minister signed, provided to all of his ministers. In the report, the Ethics Commissioner found that the Prime Minister broke four specific parts of the act.

Before I continue, I will also mention that I believe it is the first time a prime minister, in the history of Canada, has been found guilty of breaking not just any law but the ethics rules that all of us have to abide by, including members of the government. The front benchers and the members of the cabinet have to live by the rules. It is even worse that the person who is supposed to lead them, the person who is supposed to represent all of them, the Prime Minister, broke these rules. What kind of example does it set for the rest of the cabinet ministers when their own leader breaks the rules and shows no contrition whatsoever about having done so and makes no amends whatsoever to fix the matter?

There is a saying, "Every day brings forth its own sorrows." That is a Yiddish proverb. I had my own sorrow on Sunday and Monday when all my flights kept being cancelled and I could not get here, but today I believe it is going to be the sorrow of the Prime Minister, because he is in a particular situation where he has done nothing to address his ethical lapses.

I am old enough to remember that this is indeed the same old Liberal Party of Canada, the same old people who are involved. I remember Adscam. I remember the Gomery inquiry. Justice Gomery did a fantastic report at the time. We are having a repetition of the same ethical lapses of 10 to 15 years ago. It is absolutely ridiculous that we find ourselves here today. I also think this is the first time we have had concurrence in an Ethics Commissioner's report to the House that highlights the ethical lapses of the Prime Minister.

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There are five things a *Toronto Star* article mentioned that I think draw attention to the importance of having this debate today, because ethics do matter. We cannot just wash it over. Ethics do matter.

The Aga Khan did not meet the definition of a friend under the law. The Prime Minister broke the rules on gifts. The flights that were taken were an issue. I am going to go into that just a little bit more, because the Ethics Commissioner went into the details of what the Prime Minister's lawyers were saying in an interpretation of the law that I think most Canadians would find absolutely ridiculous. Finally, the Prime Minister failed to recuse himself from talks that gave him an opportunity to further the interests of the Aga Khan.

The investigation started because the former chair of the ethics committee wrote a letter. It was the member for Red Deer—Lacombe, a Conservative member of Parliament, who pointed out to the Ethics Commissioner the potential ethical breaches in the behaviour of the Prime Minister. I remember that at the time, that side of the House, including very specific parliamentary secretaries, were saying that this was not an issue. They were asking why there was a focus on a vacation trip when we should be focusing on jobs, the economy, and all these other things.

However, ethics matter, especially in leadership. Role models Canadians look toward for ethical decision-making, who are leading the country, should be held to the highest possible standard. More so, they should set the bar even higher for themselves and do so in a very public manner. When they cannot even meet the bar they set, and they cannot even meet the bar set by the House of Commons itself, it becomes a matter the House should consider through concurrence in the report.

In that report, the Ethics Commissioner said,

There was nothing unusual, unforeseen, or unavoidable about this trip. [The Prime Minister] was well aware, given his previous stay on the island in 2014, that private transportation was needed to reach the Aga Khan's private island.

One of the points the lawyers tried to make was that actually, this ethical breach, which the Ethics Commissioner said was a violation of the law, was unavoidable. The lawyers claimed that there was no way to plan around this. The RCMP needed to do it.

● (1025)

The Prime Minister knew in 2014 that if he went to this island, it would be exactly the same situation. The Ethics Commissioner said it was unavoidable, that he should have known better. The Prime Minister contravened sections 5, 11, 12, and 21 of the act. The Ethics Commissioner found that he failed to meet the general duty found in section 5, because he vacationed on the Aga Khan's private island.

Section 11, which is the purpose of my amendment, deals with the gifts that were received during this trip. The Prime Minister accepted hospitality and gifts and the use of the private island that personally benefited him. He never cleared it with the Ethics Commissioner ahead of time. He just did it, and after the fact, he claimed that he had learned a lesson and that it probably will not happen again. How can we trust that? He showed no contrition. He made no attempt to modify the law to live up to the higher standard he set for cabinet ministers.

Section 12 prohibits ministers and members of their families from accepting travel on non-commercial charter or private aircraft. By

the way, the lawyers quibbled over the definition in French and English, aircraft versus *avion*, in the report. That does not cover helicopters. I find it absolutely ridiculous that the Prime Minister would instruct his lawyers to make that type of defence, but it is in the report itself. Any Canadian can read it and see it in black and white.

The Ethics Commissioner said,

[The Prime Minister] contravened Section 12 when he and his family accepted travel provided by the Aga Khan on a private aircraft. The travel was not required as part of his official duties, the circumstances were not exceptional and he did not seek the prior approval of the Commissioner.

Last, “the Prime Minister contravened Section 21 when he failed to recuse himself from two discussions during which he had an opportunity to improperly further the private interests of” the Aga Khan.

As the opposition House leader has said, the Aga Khan Foundation and the Aga Khan himself do a lot of good work, charitable work, all around the world. It is not incumbent upon the Aga Khan to recuse himself. It is incumbent upon the Prime Minister to recuse himself. He is the person responsible for ensuring that he does not find himself in a conflict of interest. All members of cabinet have to live up to this higher standard, a higher standard set not only by the Prime Minister but also by the House of Commons through the ethics legislation that was passed in 2006, with mass party support. We all agreed at the time that the ethical bar had to be raised, and indeed, it was raised.

It is interesting that now we find ourselves in this situation, 12 years after that truly historic and monumental piece of legislation came down. It was the first piece of legislation put forward by the Conservative government in 2006. It set forth new ethical rules that all members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, and the prime minister were expected to live up to.

The Prime Minister has failed to live up to those standards, and now we find ourselves today concurring in a report from the Ethics Commissioner to draw the attention of Canadians to the Prime Minister's lack of ethical standards and his complete inability to show any contrition or make amends or propose modifications to the rules to ensure that this will never happen again. It may quite easily happen again.

There is also the issue of the gifts. We do not know what the illegal gifts were. As the opposition House leader said, members of Parliament and Canadians have a right to know what they were.

I see that my time is up. I would like to move the amendment I spoke of at the beginning of my remarks. I move:

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That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “THAT” and substituting the following: the report of the Ethics Commissioner, entitled “The Trudeau Report”, tabled on Monday, January 29, 2018, be not now concurred in, but that, pursuant to section 28(13) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, it be referred back to the Commissioner with instruction that he amend the same to include recommendations to close the loopholes in the Code, as well as the Conflict of Interest Act, that allowed the Prime Minister to withhold from the public the nature of the unacceptable gifts he received from the Aga Khan because the public registry includes only acceptable gifts within the meaning of section 14 of the Code and Section 11 of the Conflict of Interest Act.

• (1030)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Laval—Les Îles.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the easiest thing to do is to criticize someone, especially when that person is achieving something the previous government was unable to achieve.

I would like to remind my colleagues in the other parties that they do not see what the Prime Minister has achieved, with his historical investment in infrastructure to create jobs and grow the economy, protecting the environment, lifting hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty, shifting Canada's name from the bottom line to the highest international levels, and putting Canada on the front line of the G7.

I am sorry to say that either those members do not see it the way they should, which means they are blind, or they have to open their eyes more, be realistic, and tell the truth to the Canadian people.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members to please respect the person who is speaking. I am sure the person who will be answering the question is quite capable. If others have questions and comments, please stand to be recognized.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, ethics matter, especially when it is the Prime Minister who is leading the cabinet and who has been given this immense responsibility and privilege to serve as the Prime Minister. Ethics do matter.

The member talked about infrastructure. It is interesting. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that half of the money comes from the Harper era, and none of the money appears inside the budget. This great accomplishment does not appear in the government's own budget document.

On child poverty rates, the member must know that the government's own numbers go back to 2014, including two years of the Harper era government, which was the only government, going all the way back to the Chrétien time, that actually reduced child poverty rates. It can be looked up at Statistic Canada. It is right there.

Finally, on the G7, international stature of Canada, I will remind the member of the Prime Minister's laughable, ignorant, arrogant, prideful trip to India, where he embarrassed our country and all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He touched very briefly on the Prime Minister's desperate attempt to justify his trip and claim that, according to his lawyers, he did not violate section 12, which mentions airplanes. The English and French versions actually say two different things. The English version uses the word “aircraft”, I think, and the French one uses the word “avion”, which means airplane. Obviously, he went with the version that suited him when he justified his trip and the use of a private helicopter on the grounds that a helicopter is not an airplane. He went with the French version, claiming that, when the two versions differ, the one that makes the most sense or best captures the legislative intent takes precedence.

He is trying to convince Canadians that, when he was planning the trip, he read section 12 of the Conflict of Interest Act before agreeing to go on the trip, saw the words “aircraft” and “avion”, and decided to go with the French version and accept the trip on the grounds that he was complying with section 12. That is an act of true desperation.

What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

• (1035)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, who belongs to another party but sometimes sits with me on the Standing Committee on Finance. He is perfectly correct. The word in question appears on page 55 of the English version, which is the only one I have here, since I left the French version at my office. He is correct that the French says “avion” and the English says “aircraft”. The Prime Minister should have known that there is a difference. It seems he asked his own lawyers to say it was all right because the act did not contain the word “helicopter”. He thinks that he can take the Aga Khan's helicopter on a private vacation with his family and accept a gift from the Aga Khan, who has business dealings with the Canadian government. It is utterly preposterous for the Prime Minister to instruct his own lawyers to advance that argument. Indeed, the Ethics Commissioner's report mentions that very defence, namely that the act does not mention the word “helicopter”, so it was all right for him to accept. This shows that the Prime Minister has a total lack of judgment.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as in the past, I always believe it is such a privilege to stand inside the chamber and participate in debates. Today is no exception to that.

However, I am somewhat disappointed in both opposition parties and their desire to try to deal with an issue that has been dealt with already. It is interesting. We have that unholy alliance across the way, the New Democrats and the Conservatives, who are convinced that the best way to attack this government is not to talk about fiscal policy, not to talk about social policy, but rather to look at ways they can attack the individual, go after the person. We have witnessed that time and again.

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Canadians have an expectation of what takes place inside this beautiful chamber. They expect us to talk about laws, about budgets, and about our priorities for Canadians. If they review the speeches given inside the chamber, they will find that only one party has been consistent in addressing the important issues that Canadians want us to debate and address inside the chamber. It is not the Conservatives and it is not the New Democrats. It is the Government of Canada, the Liberal caucus, the backbench MPs to the ministers, that is addressing those very important issues.

Those members want to talk about credibility of an individual and this report. They want to make things as personal as possible, this whole character assassination of sorts. Let me remind members across the way that this government has been open, transparent, and accountable to Canadians. The Prime Minister demonstrated that even before he became the Prime Minister of Canada.

For the hecklers from the New Democrats, when the NDP was the official opposition, it resisted openness and accountability when it came to members of Parliament and what they should report to Canadians.

When the Prime Minister first became leader of the Liberal Party, one of the first initiatives he took, outside of dealing with the importance of Canada's middle class, was to ensure there would be more accountability and transparency in the chamber. I will remind my friends across the way how they responded to that. It was not very positive. It was not what Canadians wanted to hear. If they want to talk about saying one thing while in government and saying another thing while in opposition, or saying one thing when in official opposition, and how quickly things turn around, at least there is consistency with the Prime Minister and the Liberal caucus.

The example I am referring to is the issue of proactive disclosure. What did the New Democrats have to say about proactive disclosure? What did the Conservative Party have to say? When the Prime Minister was elected the leader of the third party, he stood in the House, not once or twice but on several occasions, to try to get the chamber to recognize that a higher bar needed to be met, and I remember because I sat right behind him. He said that one of the ways we could do that was through proactive disclosure. What was the response? Of course, as the third party it went well for us. When the then leader of the Liberal Party, now Prime Minister, asked for unanimous consent to raise that bar, the response was no from both the government of the day, the Harper bubble closed-door government, and the official opposition, the NDP party. We were saying that Canadians had a right to know some of the very basics with respect to how members of Parliament spent their taxpayer money. We were arguing for it be posted on the Internet.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1040)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind members one more time. This is the third time this morning already. I guess the two-week break was too much for some people. I want to remind members that someone has the floor. There is to be no going back and forth during the debate. The speeches are to be addressed to the Speaker. If members have questions or comments, when it is time for questions and comments, they can stand to be recognized.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader may continue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, members across the way say that it is about disclosure. They are right. In this aspect of my comments, it is all about disclosure. What did the government of the day, the Harper government, have to say? It said no. It did not believe in telling Canadians how it is members of Parliament were spending their money. The only ones that were worse than the Conservatives back then were the New Democrats.

What happened is that the leader of the Liberal Party, today's Prime Minister, said that even if the Conservatives and the NDP did not support it, the Liberal caucus would go it alone. We took the additional resources, which were scarce because we were the third party at the time, but it was important to the leader of the Liberal Party and we set up an internal system. The leader back then said that Liberal members of Parliament would participate in proactive disclosure.

It was the Conservatives and the NDP who said no, because of their unwillingness to participate if obligated. If the Liberal Party wanted to move forward on it, we had to create our own system. Now, a couple of months went by and we were into the summer. This was three or four years ago. The Conservatives had one of those road to Damascus moments, at least on the aspect of the importance of proactive disclosure. As the leader of the Liberal Party back then tried to explain to this chamber, yes, Canadians have a right to know. It is a fair expectation Canadians have in terms of knowing how members of Parliament are spending the hundreds of thousands of dollars we are individually given as members of Parliament, all of which are tax dollars, and that they have a right to know that. We applauded the Conservatives for changing their minds on it.

Of course, in order to get something done, we needed unanimous support. We still had the New Democrats refusing to give unanimous support to the issue. They fought it tooth and nail. It was not until we brought in an opposition motion, where they were literally embarrassed into supporting the idea and they had to stand up individually, that they changed their opinion. I believe that in the months and months that went by from when they initially said no, they realized, much like the Conservatives, that it was time to have proactive disclosure.

We were glad to have played a very important role in that, believing it provided more accountability and transparency to Canadians. The Prime Minister then said, once he became Prime Minister, that ministerial mandate letters would also become part of the public domain. That was something new. What would happen before was that the former prime minister, Stephen Harper, would say what he thought a department should do, that he would pass that on through a particular minister, and they were known as the mandate letters. Would they become public? It is hard to say, depending on the minister.

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Let us think in terms of what the mandate letter is. It kind of captures the essence of what some of those important priorities are that a department should be moving toward. We have a Prime Minister, virtually from taking office, saying that these mandate letters are in fact going to be public. Whether it is from virtual day one of this Liberal cabinet to today, we have seen actions by this Prime Minister, by this cabinet, and by the Liberal caucus, because all my colleagues within the Liberal caucus understand the importance of accountability and transparency. We have strived to deliver that to Canadians.

Now, there is always room for improvement. We can always do better. Maybe that is a good segue into what it is we are debating through this particular report.

• (1045)

Issues come up. All prime ministers travel. When prime ministers travel, they do not travel alone. There is a security issue. Let us wake up the Conservative Party and talk about Stephen Harper. When Stephen Harper travelled, there was a security detail that went with him. That is part of being a prime minister. There has to be security. Believe it or not, there are individuals around the world who would like to cause harm to the office of the Prime Minister, so there is that need. When the Conservatives talk about the hundreds of thousands of dollars, the costs of security are very real, just like the costs of security for the House of Commons. There is a cost to seeing the RCMP officers and security individuals we have within this chamber. That is just modern-day democracy, and the way our parliamentary system works. To throw around numbers or point out these huge costs in tax dollars because the Prime Minister took a vacation is disingenuous. It is meant to get Canadians upset. That is the real purpose of it. What is it that the opposition members are really trying to do? They do not have anything to talk about.

I will get to some of the things that are important to Canadians which this government will continue to be focused on, but before I do that, I want to pick up on the question I had posed to the opposition House leader. Why do the official opposition in particular, with the support of the unholy alliance the New Democratic Party, want to continue to hit at the personal level?

I was in opposition for over 20 years. Most of my political career has been in opposition. Based on the experience I had in opposition, I can say that yes, at times we need to hold government accountable for some of the things that a minister, a prime minister, a premier, or even non-ministers do. We have independent agencies, such as the Ethics Commissioner, the Lobbying Commissioner, and Elections Canada. We have individuals who are far more independent in their thinking than the opposition parties are.

The current Conservative Party goes out of its way, because it does not have anything to say about the economy. It does not have anything to say with respect to the social programming this government has been introducing since it has been mandated. These are very strong, tangible things that I will go into. However, before I do that, members should recognize that the reason we are debating this report today is that it fits the Conservative agenda of let us not talk about substance or government policy; let us talk about who we can attack in the cabinet of the Liberal government or even at times non-cabinet members. That is what the Conservatives look for all of

the time. They are consistent when it comes to that. I will use the words “character assassination”, because that is what it feels like at times.

We have these independent offices so that if opposition members have concerns, they can raise those concerns in addition to raising them on the floor of the House. If we look at the report that was issued by Mary Dawson, the independent commissioner, I think it is a good report. The report is based on a lot of information. I know when the issue first came up, when the Conservatives first raised it, and good for them for raising the issue, right away there were discussions with Mary Dawson, the independent officer of Parliament, and there was an investigation.

From day one, the Prime Minister was very clear. He said that he would work co-operatively with the commissioner and respond to any of her inquiries.

• (1050)

Opposition members continued to push the issue, which they can do so. They called for the report. They demanded the report. However, we did not tell Mary Dawson that she should release the report on such and such date. This is an independent office. If we were to do that, we would then be criticized for telling the independent office to provide the report by such-a-such date.

However, when Mary Dawson came out with report, what took place? Immediately after the commissioner's report was tabled in the House, the Prime Minister took responsibility. He went over and above what was being requested. The Prime Minister said that when he went on a vacation, he would advance that information to the office.

It was not as if there something was intentionally done to try to hide this. No one was trying to hide something. However, when people listen to the Conservatives, they would think there was a mass conspiracy. That is what the Conservatives want Canadians to believe.

The Prime Minister took immediate responsibility and took specific actions to address the situation. However, it was not good enough. The Conservatives saw the report, which we are debating today. Why? Because it does not fit the Conservatives' narrative of who cares about what is happening in our communities with respect to economics or social policy. All they care about is how they can attack the individual. Far too often I see that demonstrated, whether in question period or otherwise.

What were we supposed to debate today? The budget implementation bill. However, instead of debating that bill, we are debating an issue that is not new, that we have spent hours and hours of debate on. Instead of talking about the bill, the Conservatives want to regurgitate the same issue on which there is a report. The Prime Minister has taken responsibility. Therefore, one must question the motivation of the members across the way.

Right now we are not debating the budget implementation bill because of the Conservatives. However, I will give them credit as they have been able to convince the New Democrats that their approach on this issue is the best approach for debate in the House. It is almost as if the enemy of my enemy is my friend is the attitude of the Conservatives and New Democrats.

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I have had many years of experience being on the opposition benches. Who knows, it could be four years, 10 years, but I hope to have a balance with the same number of years in government as in opposition. That is a hope, but it will be Canadians who make that determination. For those who are wondering, it was just over 20 years in opposition.

The joint opposition can continue to focus on the personalities. It can continue to focus on personal character assassinations. We, on the government benches, the Liberal caucus, will continue to focus on what really matters: Canada's middle class, those aspiring to be a part of it, and those who need a lifting hand. Those are the individuals we are here to represent, and we will do that day in and day out.

We will ensure there is more openness in government, more transparency, and more accountability. For those who are following the debate, they should not buy into what the joint opposition is saying, because we are moving forward on all fronts.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his eloquence. We are accustomed to his passionate speeches, but that passion is blinding him to what is really happening here.

This Liberal Party claimed to be pure as the driven snow. It said it wanted to do things differently. Now we find out that their idea of doing things differently is to revert to the era of the sponsorship scandal, and maybe worse. We will come back to that. How can a member of Parliament, whether Liberal, Conservative, or New Democrat, congratulate the Prime Minister on being the biggest spender and the least transparent and for meeting so many people that when he travels abroad, he becomes an international laughing-stock? How can a member elected to speak for his or her constituents stand up in the House to defend this Prime Minister?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I can do that very easily. What is happening is the member opposite is following the Conservative narrative. She is following, intentionally or unintentionally, I am not sure, the spin the Conservatives are trying to portray. It is a false narrative.

If this is just an issue of accountability and transparency, all the member needs to do is look at what the government has done in a very real and tangible way. If it is specifically with respect to the Prime Minister, I just spoke about the proactive disclosure. She should look at what the government has accomplished on that issue.

The Prime Minister has worked co-operatively. He has taken responsibility. It is time we talk about the economy. Perhaps we should be talking about the budget and social policy. The Conservatives are missing the boat by talking about something else, not wanting to change the topic.

• (1100)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I certainly have never been told I belong to an unholy alliance. It has been an interesting day for me in the House.

For me, this is a relatively simple question, and I appreciate the amendment. It talks about something that is fundamentally important, which is that we fix this loophole. Therefore, I would like the member to explain why fixing this loophole is such a burden to the government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, where do I start? I have talked about the NDP members tending to want to say one thing, while their actions do not necessarily follow what they are saying. The best example of that is on the proactive disclosure.

An amendment has been brought forward. We have a government that has made very clear its indications on how we can move forward in ensuring there is more accountability and transparency coming from this place. The government will take into consideration all those aspects.

If opposition members have ideas, I would encourage them to raise them. Whether it is during debates, including budget debates, or raising them in standing committees or with individuals on this side, there are all sorts of forums in which we can talk about good ideas to advance accountability and transparency. Our government genuinely believes in it.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member's contribution today to the discussion. When it comes to transparency, in the last Parliament the Prime Minister put forward a private member's bill and made it part of his electoral commitment. Then what did we see? The Liberals put forward legislation on access to information that had nothing to do with what they had promised.

In regard to the actual debate we are having today though, this is about the Ethics Commissioner. The member has said multiple times that we need to support and respect officers of Parliament, particularly the Ethics Commissioner.

When this motion comes to vote, will the member and his Liberal colleagues vote to send the report back to the commissioner for the purpose of closing the loopholes identified by the commissioner? An independent officer made recommendations. This would be about making the act better, not just for this Prime Minister and his cabinet but also for future governments. Will the member support closing those loopholes by supporting this amendment?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member made reference to access to information. He will know that the government, in a short term, in two and a half years, has brought substantial changes to access to information. It was the first real major overhaul of the legislation in over 30 years.

When there are ideas and thoughts that we can continue to move forward, the government has demonstrated a tremendous amount of good will, such as making public the mandate letters and introducing access to information legislation. Time and again, the government has moved the House forward on issues, even at times of resistance from opposition members.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague seems to be taking lessons from certain American politicians, and it is disappointing to hear him distort the truth and revise history as he sees fit and make wild accusations against his opponents. He spent 10 minutes talking about transparency and the fact that the Liberals have embraced proactive disclosure. He said there was some resistance.

I need to correct a few things my colleague said. The current system for disclosing expenses works consistently across the board; in other words, it applies equally to everyone. That is precisely what we were advocating for at the time. Under the current system, Financial Management Operations, which oversees members' expenses, has itself standards for the disclosure of information. I want my colleague to take note of that.

Also, he said at the beginning of his speech that this debate is unnecessary and a waste of time, and yet we are talking about a rather thick document in which the former commissioner of conflict of interest and ethics mentioned some very important things, particularly modernizing and improving the Conflict of Interest Act.

Is the member saying that there is no need to take time to talk about the Conflict of Interest Act in the House, in order to determine how to strengthen it and make it more effective and rigorous?

• (1105)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we have many reports on the Order Paper. If we wanted to, we could have one of those reports brought forward every day. Maybe the official opposition and the NDP would like to see that.

If it were up to those members, nothing would get through the House of Commons. They would rather debate a report. That is not to say this report is not important. The government has been acting on the issue of transparency and accountability.

At the end of the day, we should be debating the budget. Is that not an important debate? If it were up to the official opposition and the NDP, we would never debate it. They would continue to come up with ways to debate this report or that report. The number of reports we could be debating in the chamber is endless.

This report fits the narrative of the Conservatives, character assassination. The NDP have bought into it. When I talked about proactive disclosure, the member across the way was here. He was part of the New Democrats who said that they did not want proactive disclosure, not once, not twice but many times.

What I have said is consistent. The Prime Minister has been consistent since he became leader of the Liberal Party. He genuinely believes in transparency and accountability. However, he will not allow the tactics of the opposition to throw the government off course. We will continue to focus our attention on Canada's middle class, those aspiring to be a part of it, and those who are in need of government support. We see that in budget after budget, economic policy for our seniors, our kids, our working class, and individuals who need to get those tax breaks. Our focus will be on Canadians, not on the opposition.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am always proud to rise in the House and represent the people of Timmins—James Bay. It is particularly interesting to rise now after listening to what could be called a political screed by my friend from Winnipeg.

When we talk about closing ethical loopholes, it always upsets Liberals. There is something about ethical breaches and Liberals that go hand in hand. It is about their idea of friendship.

The Aga Khan was a close personal friend of the Prime Minister, apparently, when the Prime Minister took his trip to billionaire island, yet he had not really seen him in 30 years. We were told it was just a friend.

Liberals said it is not fair for me to question a billionaire who pays the Prime Minister and some key politicians to come and hang out with him, paying their way while he is lobbying, because they are just friends. They said, "Don't you have friends who invite you to places?"

Yes, certainly. I am from northern Ontario. I get invited to fish huts all the time during the winter. For the price of a six-pack of Labatt's, I might get paid back in a little pickerel. That is not the same as Liberals who hang with billionaires who are lobbying the same government for favours.

I want to talk about this idea of friendship and the Liberals, because it is a fundamental question about ethics that they do not understand. The reason we have the Lobbying Act and the Conflict of Interest Act is so that friends do not have insider access.

The problem goes back to the pork-barrel days of the Liberals when it was about who you knew in the PMO. Buddy from the Liberal Party, tied to the Prime Minister, would step out and go into private practice. Then he would call up his friend in the Prime Minister's Office, and changes would be made.

We have realized that this is not ethical. What is ethical is that there has to be a standard for lobbying so that we know who is lobbying and why they are lobbying. A little transparency goes a long way.

The issue of closing an ethical loophole matters, because what we do in Parliament is about reassuring Canadians that they can trust us. They do not have to pay attention to all the details of the vote. In fact, there is not a single voter who would agree with every single thing we do as parliamentarians, because we are called upon to make decisions on all manner of issues. However, our voters should be able to trust that we are acting in the best interests of the Canadian people and that when we meet with large financial interests that are trying to influence government policy, it is being done in a transparent manner and for the benefit of Canadians.

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This is why I want to get back to this notion of friends and Liberal friends. We have the situation of the Prime Minister, who flew to billionaire island and contravened numerous sections of the Conflict of Interest Act. It is actually unprecedented that a Prime Minister has been found guilty of breaching the Conflict of Interest Act for accepting gifts, for accepting favours, yet the Prime Minister did not think anything was wrong because he said the guy he had not seen in 30 years was a personal family friend. It is though they were above the law and it is very embarrassing.

I would chalk that up. I do not think there was malice on the part of the Prime Minister. My Conservative friends always think there was some kind of skulduggery; I do not. I think the Prime Minister thought, "He knew my dad and he is a billionaire; I like hanging out with billionaires, and I get a free trip to an island." However, the Prime Minister needs to understand that he has to set a better example, because he promised a better example. He promised it in the 2015 election when he said it would not just be the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. My God, how the Liberals have fallen since then.

The other guest who hung out on the beach on billionaire island, who is now the Veterans Affairs minister, did not even bother to report the trip. The Prime Minister did not report the gifts he received from the Aga Khan because he said that since they were inappropriate gifts, he did not need to say what they were.

Over the many years I have been here, I have heard all manner of hogswallow when it comes to defending abuse, but I have never heard someone use a loophole to say that since it was inappropriate, they were not obligated to say what it was, and therefore they were somehow protected. I want to know if the member who is now the Veterans Affairs minister used this same logic when he decided that just because he took a trip to billionaire island, he did not need to report it. In fact, we need to report everything we do to the Ethics Commissioner. It is up to the Ethics Commissioner to decide whether it is appropriate or not. It is not for the individual member to say, "Well, I accepted this free gift because, hey, it was a free gift, and it does not affect my political work." Everything does. It is about accountability.

• (1110)

Speaking of friends of the Liberal Party, let us talk about Stephen Bronfman. This man is one of the most powerful men in Canada, and he is certainly a powerful Liberal fundraiser. In fact, he is so powerful that he raised \$250,000 for the Liberal Party and his personal friend, the Prime Minister, in two hours. That is an amazing power.

The Prime Minister would say they are just friends, because the Prime Minister certainly loves hanging out with billionaires. The Prime Minister held a recent fundraiser with billionaires and the super-rich in Montreal, and he told us that the reason they were there was to get tough on the one per cent. Can members imagine that? Do they imagine that the reason that the billionaire class is paying money to the Liberal party is so that it can get tough on the one per cent? That is not how life works.

How it does work was shown when Stephen Bronfman was named in the paradise papers scandal, a scandal that identified powerful people around the world who were evading their tax

responsibilities through tax havens. When Stephen Bronfman was one of the Canadians named, the Prime Minister immediately intervened and said that no investigation was necessary, and no investigation happened. That is the power of friends in the Prime Minister's Office.

It was also highly inappropriate, because it is not up to the Prime Minister of this country to decide in advance whether tax laws in this country are being broken or they are not just because someone is, first, his personal friend, and second, he raises money for the Liberal Party. That is not an ethical standard that we can trust, but it seems to work for the current government.

This issue needs to be called out.

In the recent debacle in India, the Prime Minister's trip seemed to be much more about trying to shore up domestic ridings to win than about international diplomacy, international security, or international credibility. We had the bizarre and unprecedented situation of a convicted terrorist getting on the all-access pass list because he was very powerful in local B.C. Liberal politics. We also have the case of the member for Brampton East who went on that trip. After he got elected, he went into business. For folks back home, it is very rare that someone decides to go into business after becoming an MP. For the few who do, there have to be clear laws in place so that they are not using their desk in Parliament to help their friends. However, the member for Brampton East, we are told, invited his business partner to have access to the Prime Minister and to key Liberal members and ministers on that India trip.

Does that pass the smell test? It certainly does not, and it raises a question about the lack of ethics and accountability in the Liberal caucus right now, since the Liberals seem to think that this is perfectly okay. In fact, we have heard from every senior voice in the Liberal government on these ethical breaches, and not once did they take these issues seriously. They seem to think it is okay because he is a good guy, the other guy is a good guy, and they are all friends. It is this culture of friends and using the position of power within politics to further the interests of friends that is wrong.

The issue before us today is about closing loopholes. I have spent many years on this file, and it always surprises me that even when we think we have done our best to make sure that people will follow the spirit of the law, there will be always those who try to find a way to slip around it.

As exhibit A, I present the finance minister. I have been told by the Liberals that I am completely out of line because this finance minister is virtuous, that people who are that rich who offer themselves to public service have to be somehow more virtuous by nature because they do not need to come to Ottawa. That is fair play, but the finance minister, when he was head of Morneau Shepell, his family business, announced to his investors that we needed legislation in Canada to be able to change the defined pension benefits and allow the targeted pension plans that were the whole focus of Morneau Shepell's business. He said that there was an enormous opportunity and that his company, Morneau Shepell, was in the driver's seat.

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•(1115)

He offered himself as a candidate for public service. The very first order of business he brought forward was the Bill C-27 legislation that would directly benefit the company and the industry that he represented. That is extraordinary, and the Prime Minister supported it. There was no recusing at cabinet of a man who had a pecuniary financial interest.

Later we found out, of course, that he still had his financial interest. He was making about \$150,000 a month from his Morneau Shepell shares while he was pursuing an interest that would benefit Morneau Shepell. He became famous because he was so rich that he forgot that he owned a château in the south of France. Again, the Liberals said that we were being mean and that was really unfair. A lot of people forget things. I mean, I forget things all the time. When I was leaving the House the other day, I forgot my car keys. I could not find where they were. However, I do not know anybody in the House who forgets that they own a château in the south of France. That is the level of disconnect of the 1% from the rest of us.

The reason this matters is that the fundamental economic issue of our time around the world is the growing disparity between the super-rich, whose interests have been advanced year after year after year, and the growing new working class, both white collar and blue collar, who are finding it harder and harder because they are dealing with large levels of student debt and precarious work. The Liberal government is deeply embedded within that 1%, using its position and political agendas to advance friends and help their friends. The Liberals say that this is all perfectly okay because they are all nice people. That is not an ethical standard of accountability.

Today we have an opportunity to close an ethical loophole that was clearly identified. I would think that when we identify these loopholes, it is incumbent upon all of us within the political realm to say that we should just do the right thing here to make sure that this kind of abuse does not happen in the future and close that loophole.

I return to what the Prime Minister promised in the 2015 election. I was so impressed when he stepped forward and talked about openness and transparency and transparent government, principles that Canadians across the political spectrum agree with.

There are issues that we have always had with the ethics code and the Lobbying Act. Certainly with the ethics code it has always been that if one did not find a person falling down dead with another person holding a smoking gun in their hand and the Ethics Commissioner walking in at the time, intent could never be proven. The lobbying commissioner has pointed out time and time again that it is about the spirit of the act. It is the power of people to influence politicians that has to be clearly defined, because super-powerful people do not have to register for lobbying. That is because they know the people in the PMO. They are the friends, the ones who hang out on the beach on the private islands with key politicians. They make a phone call, and the job gets done.

When the Prime Minister said that he would establish a higher standard, a standard that represented the spirit of the law and not just the narrow letter of the law, I was deeply encouraged, yet here we are with ethical scandal after ethical scandal, and every time, the Prime Minister or his front-bench people step up in defence, because

technically no one was caught on anything. They are our friends. The people we hang with are nice people, and there is no need to address these loopholes.

I find that to be an appallingly low standard.

There is a new line that the Liberals use. They used it for my colleague from Brampton and then my colleague from Newfoundland, who took the trip to billionaire island. They say they always “work very closely with the Ethics Commissioner”. What they need to put as a prefix is “after we get caught”. After we get caught, we work closely with the Ethics Commissioner. That is what the Prime Minister and his minions have told us: that the Prime Minister worked very closely with the Ethics Commissioner.

•(1120)

The Prime Minister started to work with the Ethics Commissioner after the complaint was lodged and after he had been found guilty of numerous breaches, such as accepting inappropriate travel and inappropriate gifts from someone in a position to lobby. He did not recuse himself from decisions that could have benefited that powerful lobbyist.

If the Prime Minister and his caucus stood by the principle of working closely with the Ethics Commissioner, they would have phoned the Ethics Commissioner prior to these issues, prior to inviting a business partner to meet with the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers on the India trip. They would have asked if it was okay for them to open some doors for a business partner. The Ethics Commissioner would have responded. That is how we work closely with the Ethics Commissioner. We work with the commissioner in advance to make sure that we are not caught in illegalities or a breach of the rules. We do not wait until we get caught. We do not wait until it becomes a newspaper story and then say that we will make sure we do not do it again. That is a lower standard and a standard that, unfortunately, the Prime Minister and his government seem to have worked their way toward.

There are moments when we have to take a breath in Parliament and say that breaches have happened. When they do happen, we need to then come forward with a credible set of responses.

This brings us back to the defeat of the Liberals in 2006, when there were so many ethical breaches, so many legal breaches in the sponsorship scandal, that we needed to bring forward new legislation, which we did. That legislation was about lobbying. It was about limiting the influence of insiders on political decisions. It was about making sure that we had a higher standard of accountability.

The previous government had many failures and falls as well. There was the notorious Bev Oda, who spent thousands of dollars on limousine rides bombing around Toronto. Bev thought it was perfectly okay. Paul Calandra lobbied, while he was a parliamentary secretary, for FM licenses. If I remember correctly, that money was returned, because it was deemed inappropriate. Bruce Carson was invited into the PMO. He was convicted of fraud. He then left the office and came back trying to sell water plants to desperately poor indigenous communities. His case of inappropriate illegalities went all the way to the Supreme Court.

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There will always be politicians who abuse the system. That is part and parcel of public life. When an egregious loophole appears, it is incumbent upon all political parties to close that loophole. It is fairly straightforward. We cannot assume that all politicians will be either moral enough to do that or bright enough to pay attention to the act and understand the implications of using their offices to help friends.

It is an interesting report on the Prime Minister and the Conflict of Interest Act. The Ethics Commissioner found that the Prime Minister “contravened section 11 of the Act when he or his family accepted the gifts of hospitality from the Aga Khan and the use of his private island in March and December 2016.”

The Ethics Commissioner found that the exception for gifts from relatives and friends, under paragraph 11(2)(b) of the act, did not apply, because the Prime Minister’s “relationship with the Aga Khan was based on a family connection rooted in a friendship” with the Prime Minister’s father that existed 30 years earlier. The Prime Minister accepted inappropriate gifts and said that they were personal family gifts, when he had not met the guy in 30 years.

This is really important. The report said that section 21 of the act was deliberately contravened by the Prime Minister:

he did not recuse himself from discussions that provided an opportunity to improperly further the private interest associated with one of the institutions of the Aga Khan and that he contravened section 5 for failing to arrange his private affairs as to avoid such an opportunity.

That is a serious breach, because that is a question about gifts from powerful people to powerful politicians. It is the power to influence political decisions, and that is what the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner was concerned about.

There was, of course, the contravention of section 12 of the act.

I see I am running out of time. I could go on all day about the ethical breaches of the present government, but I will close on that note.

● (1125)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things that strikes my constituents about this particular issue is that the Ethics Commissioner found that the Prime Minister broke the law, and there was no imposition of a punitive sanction. At the same time, when the finance minister was found to have broken the rules with respect to the disclosure of his forgotten villa, as the member talked about, there was a sanction. It was a couple of hundred dollars. That probably will not break the bank for the finance minister, but at least there was some kind of sanction.

I wonder if the member can speak further to the issue of a consequence if one breaks the law. What kind of response is reasonable? Is it enough for the law to identify when it has been broken but nothing else, or is there a need, a basic expectation Canadians would have, that there would actually be some kind of response when the Prime Minister or someone else in public office breaks the law?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I have heard the Conservatives ask this question many times. Personally, I am more wary of putting a financial sanction on the Prime Minister of our

country for a breach, because the office is so important. However, what I expect from the Prime Minister is full acceptance of responsibility for the actions that caused that breach. This is about the role of the Prime Minister of our nation. It is not simply about a politician or someone who has friends. It represents something greater. I feel that the Prime Minister failed us in this instance. We got a lot of glib talking points and did not get that level of accountability.

With respect to the finance minister, what strikes me is the fact that he forgot his villa and paid a fine of a couple of hundred dollars. He makes more money than that on his stock options by six o’clock in the morning. He probably did not notice it. I am much more concerned about his role with respect to Bill C-27, which I believe is a very clear conflict of interest that would help the pecuniary interest of his family business. That he was allowed to bring that bill forward, and that his company was allowed to be involved in the Sears bankruptcy while the government refused to help the Sears workers, is to me is a very disturbing abuse of the public interest.

● (1130)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think it bears repeating that this is the type of response we have had from both New Democrat and Conservative members regarding the report.

It is important to note that immediately after the commissioner’s report was tabled, the Prime Minister took responsibility, accepted the findings, and committed to working with the Office of the Ethics Commissioner on future personal and family vacations. For weeks and months, the opposition members asked for a report to be tabled. Now that it has been done, they refuse to accept the findings and conclusions in the report itself.

Today is a great example of when we should be debating the budget implementation bill. We are talking about billions of dollars. It is an important aspect of Parliament to deal with budgets, finances, and social policy.

I wonder if my friend from across the way would recognize that we could debate reports endlessly, not only this report but other priority reports. Does the member not believe that there comes a time when we need to debate government bills, such as budget implementation bills?

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Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I am somewhat surprised that my friend thought we did not support the findings of the Ethics Commissioner. I think it was a very well-rounded report. She did not find him guilty on all matters but only with respect to key areas, such as the unacceptability of accepting gifts, of trying to then claim that those gifts came from a personal friend, when they were clearly not from a personal friend but were from someone who was in a position to influence government policy, and the failure of the Prime Minister, under section 21, to recuse himself from discussions that provided an opportunity to improperly further the private interests associated with the institutions of the Aga Khan. To me, these were a very clear repudiation of the Prime Minister's position that he has been working all along to further the interests of accountability in this country.

The question we are debating here today is not just the report. We are debating closing the loophole so that this kind of abuse does not happen in the future. That is incumbent upon us as parliamentarians. When a report is delivered that has findings, the government can say that it is great and put it on a shelf with all the other findings it has ignored over the years, or the government can do the right thing and say that it accepts that there was a breach and that it needs to make sure that in the future, it cannot drive a Mack truck full of Liberal lobbyists through these kinds of loopholes. Unfortunately, the current government is trying to divert attention from these egregious loopholes being used by the Liberals to help their friends. I would encourage my Liberal colleague to say that the government will support the amendment and close the loophole. We can then get back to discussing other matters that are certainly of great importance to Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention and particularly his expertise on this matter. We worked together on matters of conflicts of interest, ethics, and lobbying. I would like to know whether he has any further thoughts on the consequences of reports like this one from the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

Offenders may be fined up to \$500, but that is not a lot of money for someone like the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister. There is also a practice whereby ministers who break the law have to pay back their inappropriate spending. In fact, that was the case for a minister in the current Prime Minister's Liberal government who used a limousine outside the normal course of her duties.

Any inappropriate or illegal gift needs to be declared immediately and returned to the person who sent it. Taxpayers must be reimbursed for any inappropriate spending.

What does my colleague think about the consequences of this kind of condemnation by the conflict of interest commissioner?

• (1135)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague, who worked with me on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in the last Parliament. We saw many cases where departments or the government used loopholes to avoid their obligations to Canadians.

In this situation, it is obvious that the Prime Minister found a loophole that enabled him to avoid his obligation and receive an

illegal gift. It is possible that lobbyists have influenced the government's decisions. That is unacceptable. It is critical that Parliament eliminate loopholes because, under the Liberals, lobbyists clearly have free rein in Parliament. We need only think of the member for Newfoundland and Labrador, the member for Brampton, or the Prime Minister.

The government has set the bar very low when it comes to its obligation to follow the code of ethics and to limit the influence of lobbyists, and that is dangerous. Therefore, Parliament must ask the government to work with the other parties and eliminate these loopholes.

[English]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand to speak to this amendment.

Over the last couple of weeks, while we were in our ridings, I had an opportunity to meet with various individuals in Whitby, to have a couple of town hall meetings, and to host one of our ministers. One of the town halls I held was on the budget, and the room was full. I understand the issue of this loophole is an important one, but when it comes to what I hear from my constituents, it is not the top priority for them.

Members of Parliament should be focused on the things that are of importance to Canadians. That was why the budget implementation bill was scheduled for debate this week. That is what we should have been debating today.

The bill would put into place this year's budget. We will continue to grow the economy. We will continue to see what we have seen in Durham Region, of which Whitby is a part, a decrease in unemployment. Unemployment right now is 5.6%, which is the lowest we have seen in 15 years. We are very happy with that, especially when we think about the constituents and young people who are able to get employment.

However, there are some examples of things in the budget implementation bill that we know would be very beneficial to Canadians, such as the Canadian workers benefit to assist low-income workers and the indexed Canada child benefit. We were scheduled to debate that today, but, unfortunately, the Conservatives have moved to cut off that debate, which is quite unfortunate.

We have already made it clear that we respect the work of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. The Prime Minister accepted the findings. For weeks and weeks, those members have called for the—

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are debating the motion concerning the Prime Minister's ethics and not the budget. I would like my colleague to speak about the Prime Minister of Canada's breach of ethics. That is what we are debating this morning.

Routine Proceedings

• (1140)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the member that the debate allows for some flexibility on the topics discussed, but I also remind the members speaking that we are currently debating the amendment and the motion itself. I am sure that the parliamentary secretary will focus on the subject at hand.

[English]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Speaker, it is critically important to speak about the work of the Prime Minister, the ministers, our entire caucus, and government have done.

Over the last little while, opposition members asked for this report. For weeks and months, they asked for the report to be tabled. Now that it has been tabled, they refuse to accept the findings and conclusions. In fact, as I was saying, before my hon. colleague stepped in with that point of order, we should have been debating the budget implementation bill, but we are not.

On this side of the House, we thank the commissioner, we accept the findings, and we will follow the recommendations. The Prime Minister took responsibility. He accepted the findings and committed to working with that office.

I can certainly understand why the opposition does not want to talk about the budget. On March 22, we had a marathon vote related to the budget. A number of very important initiatives were in that legislation and the opposition voted against them. It is no wonder they are choosing to talk about a report from the Ethics Commissioner, a report that they asked for, that has been tabled, and to which we have responded.

I could give a couple of examples of some of the funding. There is research funding for Canada 150 research and centres of excellence. The opposition voted against that. In my riding of Whitby, in Durham region, there are a couple of different post-secondary institutions, the Durham College and the UOIT. They rely on research funding in order to be at the cutting edge, to ensure their students are at the cutting edge. The opposition voted against that.

Today, when we are supposed to be talking about the budget, we are talking about a report that has already been tabled by the Ethics Commissioner and for which the Prime Minister has accepted full responsibility.

During that marathon vote, the opposition voted against funding to help ensure the smooth functioning of courts to promote greater access to justice for Canadians. Opposition members have talked about court delays. They have talked about issues where access to justice has not happened in a timely manner. They voted against funding to ensure that did not happen.

Again, no wonder we are not talking about the budget implementation bill, which the Conservatives moved to cut off debate. While the point of order is to redirect my conversation back to the amendment, cutting off debate when it comes to critical funding for our communities to thrive, for our young people to thrive, for our country to thrive, it is equally as important.

I cannot understand voting against funding to preserve indigenous language and culture, and funding for investments in indigenous youth. As someone who advocates for mental health, as someone

who wants to ensure our young people have what they need to thrive and survive, I cannot understand this. We have heard about the number of different suicides and instances of poor mental health in our indigenous communities, especially among young people. Quite frankly, this is appalling.

Again, we are here talking about the report the previous commissioner tabled and her testimony at committee. Many questions related to her report were answered. We accepted the findings.

I will go back to some of the things in that vote.

• (1145)

I want to talk specifically about my last two weeks in Whitby. I had a town hall on housing and one related to the budget. The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour also came to Whitby. During the time she was there, she announced the Government of Canada's student work placement program, which received \$73 million over four years to support partnerships between industry and post-secondary institutions. As I mentioned, we have UOIT and Durham College. Trent University is in Durham region as well. She also announced \$3.5 million at Darlington Energy Complex for the electricity human resources council to support new opportunities for employers to employ post-secondary students in their elected field.

We had a full house at that event. Everyone in our community was there, from the post-secondary institutions in the riding, to Ryerson, and Centennial College. They understood the importance of those investments in our students. Not one person brought up the report from the Ethics Commissioner. Not one person brought up the Prime Minister's trip.

We held a town hall on housing. During the 22-hour vote marathon, I was supposed to be in Whitby making an announcement. We had invited individuals in the housing sector, individuals who run co-ops, individuals like those who run Denise House, a shelter for abused women. We had individuals from the Muslim Welfare Centre, who support women who are looking to transition out of abusive situations into their own homes. The announcement was for \$24 million of funding toward housing in the Durham region, which is sorely needed. I was not there because we were voting on the budget for 22 hours. Again, during that housing town hall, in a packed room, not one individual talked about an Aga Khan vacation. Not one individual talked about the report of the previous commissioner, Mary Dawson.

Not because it is not important, but when we are looking at making a \$40 billion investment in housing, with the government stepping back into this in a critical and important way, that is the priority for people. This debate is not a priority for people in Durham Region. It is not a priority for women who are trying to escape from very harmful situations and are trying to get access to housing.

The parliamentary secretary, the member for Spadina—Fort York, joined us at the town hall on housing. There was not a single question about the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's report.

Routine Proceedings

A couple of days later, we had another town hall. As a member of Parliament, it is important to give residents of my riding of Whitby access to information that allows them to understand the federal government's role, how we are spending and what we are doing. Again, it was a full house. It was a rainy, miserable day, so I thought only a couple of people would show up. We had a full house at the Centennial Building Regal Room in Whitby. I talked about the historic investment of \$94 million in Durham Region Transit. The residents of Whitby did not know about that. Having that town hall allowed them to get this information.

• (1150)

I spoke to them about the \$24-million investment in affordable housing, because some of them did not attend the town hall a couple of days before. I talked to them about the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour coming to the riding and announcing the Canada student work experience placement. I talked to them about the Canada summer jobs program, where we have doubled that investment.

Again there were no questions about the report on the Prime Minister's ethics came up. In fact, one of the things that came up related to the Prime Minister in the setting of a town hall was that he did a number of town halls across the country and answered unscripted questions about a number of different issues. He did not hide or shy away from getting criticism from Canadians or from the very challenging questions asked. In fact, it was quite incumbent upon him to have those meetings, especially in light of the fact that he travels around the world. He travels just as much across Canada talking to people, ensuring our values and positions around feminism, multiculturalism, and equity and justice are promoted. He did that. He took the time to go across the country, town by town, answering questions, some related to this matter.

During that budget town hall, the Prime Minister was applauded for being open and transparent and for making himself available to Canadians, just as I was applauded on that Saturday morning. We talked about various initiatives in the budget. We talked about the growth, progress, reconciliation, and advancement that the budget was focused on.

We talked about equality, and the fact that if we give women tools such as entrepreneurship tools and parental leave, tools that give them the opportunity to reach their full potential not just here in Canada but globally, there would be a large injection into our GDP. A McKinsey report stated that there would be a \$12-trillion to \$28-trillion injection into the global GDP. It is the same with Canada—there would be a 33% increase in our GDP—so making that investment in women is the focus of this budget.

To have the Conservatives cut off debate on this particular budget is tragic. In fact, it shows Canadians where their priorities are. Their priorities are not around growth and progress, reconciliation, or advancement. We saw that again during that marathon vote, when they voted against every initiative in which we were making investments in things they argued for—for example, the resettlement of Yazidi women. They made a big spectacle on how we were not welcoming Yazidi women. Well, when it came time to vote for the funding to support that, what did they do? They voted against it. It is all smoke and mirrors over here.

This government continues to focus on what really matters to Canadians. What really matters to Canadians is the growth of the country, the fact that we have the highest growth in the G7, the fact that small business, the engine of our economy, has grown and produced 600,000 jobs. We have the lowest unemployment in 40 years. That is what we should be talking about, but we are talking about the Ethics Commissioner's report.

• (1155)

On this side of the House, we respect all officers of Parliament. The Prime Minister has committed to working with the office of the commissioner to clear all future personal family vacations. We take this seriously. We take the report seriously. The opposition called for it for weeks and weeks, and it has been tabled. The Prime Minister has agreed. The House leader has stood many times to say that we will comply with the recommendations, that we will ensure that we clear all future family vacations of the Prime Minister with the office of the commissioner. We have accepted the findings.

However, that is not good enough, and I see why. It is because the opposition members do not want to talk about the budget. Why would they want to talk about it after they took such diligent and particular effort to vote against many of the initiatives that we put forward to ensure that Canadians have what they need to thrive and be successful?

I am now the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development. There was an investment to support our international assistance priority. What did the opposition do? It voted against that. We are talking about an additional two billion dollars in the budget to support the poorest and most vulnerable in our world. Again, they were making a scene around Daesh and the atrocities committed on the Yazidi women. We are trying to focus with our international partners, and at this point I would like to thank our NGOs in Canada and around the world who support these great initiatives and work to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable, often women and children, have the opportunities and tools they need to succeed and to contribute to our global economy.

However, the opposition members voted against that. Why would we cut off debate on this budget when it has so many important initiatives that require funding and require Canada to take a leadership role with our NGO partners around the world.

Canadians are volunteering. It is National Volunteer Week. We have volunteers around the world who are looking for that extra support to do the great work that they do, but today we have cut off debate to talk again about a report that has already been asked for and has been tabled.

Those members were voting against funding for first nations emergency response services, voting against youth employment strategies. Members wax poetic about how important Canada's national defence is, but they voted against that. It is no wonder that they want to cut off debate. They voted against our defence policy to have a strong, secure, and engaged military.

Routine Proceedings

I am going to reiterate that we are going to continue to work with the commissioner as it pertains to the Prime Minister's family and personal vacations. He will ensure that they are cleared by the commissioner's office. The opposition asked for the report to be tabled. It has been. We have accepted the findings, and the Prime Minister has taken responsibility.

• (1200)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have one simple question for the member.

I tabled an amendment to the motion, asking for the report to be sent to the Ethics Commissioner so she can look at the Conflict of Interest Act and the call from the House of Commons to close the loophole that allows the Prime Minister to keep and accept gifts that are deemed to be unacceptable illegal gifts.

The member holds a privileged position on that side of the aisle. She is a member technically of the backbench and she also holds the role of parliamentary secretary, so she has knowledge of what cabinet ministers are thinking. Will the government be voting in favour of my amendment, and will the government caucus be voting in favour of my amendment to the main motion?

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Speaker, I want to be clear that we support and respect the commissioner and the office that is held by the commissioner. The office of the commissioner is an important role. She has looked at this particular issue. The previous commissioner tabled the report. We have agreed to clear all future personal and family vacations. We have agreed to accept the findings, and the Prime Minister has taken responsibility.

Our government takes openness and transparency very seriously. We can ensure that more openness and transparency happen throughout our tenure. We can do better; better is always possible. We look forward to working with the members of the opposition to ensure that we continue to strengthen that very robust road that we are currently on toward more openness and transparency.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, when I am watching TV and an infomercial comes on, I switch the channel, but unfortunately I cannot do this in the House. It really feels as though the Liberals have been subjecting us to one long infomercial since the beginning of this debate. They say that the Prime Minister has taken responsibility, fine. However, in Canadians' minds, accepting responsibility also means taking concrete action to ensure that it does not happen again. The amendment is very simple, and the Liberals are telling us how important the budget debate is. I have a lot to say about the budget. Why not cut this short and agree that the amendment makes sense and that the Liberals support it. Then, we could vote and get back to talking about the budget, on which people obviously have a lot to say.

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Speaker, I absolutely agree. The conversation and debate about the budget are absolutely important.

I could see why the opposition has cut off debate on this particular issue. On March 22, we had an opportunity to stand up and vote for a number of different funding opportunities within this budget, which

the opposition members voted against: funding to resettle survivors of Daesh, the Yazidi women; funding to prevent gender-based violence; funding to support our RCMP; funding to support our military; and funding to support international aid. It is no wonder that this debate has been cut off.

It is no wonder that they want to talk about a report that has already been tabled. They asked for it, it has been tabled, and we have accepted responsibility. The Prime Minister has stood up many times and said that he has accepted responsibility.

I agree with my colleague that the budget debate is a very important one, one that we should be occupying this House with and debating right now. This is what is important to people in Whitby. That is why I had a full, standing-room-only town hall on Saturday afternoon, a three-hour luncheon with people talking about it. They wanted to know more. There was not one question about this particular issue.

• (1205)

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

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that my colleague is going into the constituency and listening to what constituents have to say and trying to identify those important issues. If we went to Winnipeg today, we would be talking about the Winnipeg Jets. They are having an awesome season. Everyone wants to see them go to the Stanley Cup with the Winnipeg Whiteout and all that good stuff.

However, today we try to debate a motion that the opposition has brought forward.

There are many different reports out there. The opposition could bring reports day after day, yet it seems to me—and we are thinking along the same lines here—that the priority of Canadians is the issues that we hear about at our community events, and there is nothing more important than a budget debate. I suspect it is only a question of time before we will start to hear members saying that they want more time for the budget debate, yet they are not debating it today.

This is the ideal day on which we could be debating it. I wonder if the member could provide some thoughts on that issue.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, we have heard opposition members say a number of times that this is really important legislation, that we need to debate it, and that it is critical. This budget has a number of different initiatives that would help not just the members on the government side, but all members.

However, the opportunity to pose challenging questions to the government, to provide recommendations, to make future improvements, and to look at and analyze the components of the budget that are particularly important to their region and their constituencies is what was essentially cut off today. That is what the opposition decided, to say that this is not important and to talk about a report that has been tabled, that the government has accepted, and that the Prime Minister has taken full responsibility for.

Routine Proceedings

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her infomercial on the Liberal Party. If she thinks that we are not interested in the budget, she is mistaken.

It is important to know two things. First, the current Prime Minister is the first person who has held that position to be investigated for ethical reasons, and not just once or twice, but several times. Second, we have received a report in which he was found guilty. It is therefore important to shed some light on the Prime Minister's conduct, since he represents all Canadians.

Members of political parties, no matter what their stripes, must follow a code of ethics. The Prime Minister did not do that and was found guilty. We are asking this question today because we remember the Gomery commission and the \$400 million that was never repaid, as well as a disastrous \$436,000 trip.

How can an MP, whether Liberal or not, accept the fact that her Prime Minister is tarnishing Canadians' reputation?

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, the member started by saying that I am doing an infomercial, but somebody needs to talk about the budget. Somebody needs to decide that we are going to bring up important issues, which the constituents in my riding are focused on. Somebody needs to do that.

The member talked about the behaviour of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister accepted responsibility. He also went across the country earlier this year and answered questions from Canadians from coast to coast to coast. He did not sit in a corner and hide. He decided that he was going to go out there and accept that responsibility, and on top of that answer any unscripted questions that Canadians might have.

If we want to talk about the behaviour of the Prime Minister, let us talk about Canada's position in the world. Let us talk about the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Let us talk about an unemployment rate that is the lowest in 40 years. Let us talk about the fact that, under this particular government, Canadians have created over 600,000 jobs, most of them full-time. Let us talk about that, because Canadians who are worried about their current situation or about the economy want to know that. That happened under the leadership of this Prime Minister. He did not cower but decided that it was incumbent upon him to be out there speaking. Again, this is the debate that the opposition decided to cut off.

The report has been tabled. We have already accepted the findings, and the Prime Minister has accepted full responsibility.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Madawaska—Restigouche.

I am very pleased to rise in the House today to take part in a debate on a topic that has been discussed at great length in the House over the past few months and that our Conservative colleagues would like to revive. It has been the subject of much debate and has

generated dozens of questions from the opposition, questions that the Prime Minister has answered very openly, transparently, and honestly.

The Prime Minister never dodges the issue. He is at the media's disposal and answers all of their questions. He also answers questions from Canadians by holding town halls, as he has been doing over the past few months all over Canada. This is important because he gets to find out what is going on and hear people's concerns. I think our colleagues across the aisle should take inspiration from the kind of meetings the Prime Minister holds. That way, they would come to understand the concerns of Canadians.

The questions primarily touch on families and youth. Canadians want our government to focus on economic development, help our families cope in challenging times, and help our business owners grow their business. That is certainly what we are doing with the latest budget measures. Canadians are especially proud because the Canadian economy is doing well, thanks to our most recent budget and the other two budgets that have been tabled in the past few years. This budget helped created 600,000 jobs across Canada, because business owners and Canadians have confidence in the economy and are investing in their businesses. Workers are taking the jobs they are being offered, which is sending the unemployment rate plummeting. The latest figures show that unemployment in Canada is around 5.9%, the lowest level since 1976. We are very proud of this amazing achievement.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives want to divert the debate and focus on other questions that the Prime Minister has already answered honestly. We respect government institutions and the commissioners who are appointed to do their job. Again, the Prime Minister co-operated with the Ethics Commissioner and answered her questions. Immediately after the report was tabled, since that is what is at issue in the House today, the Prime Minister stated clearly in the House and in front of the media that he would take responsibility. He accepted the findings of the report and committed to submitting his future plans for personal or family vacations to the commissioner.

For months, the opposition asked dozens of questions in the House and we are here again today debating this issue. Now that the report has been tabled, the opposition is refusing to accept the findings. We, on the other hand, want to thank the commissioner for her excellent work and, again, we accept her findings and, like the Prime Minister, we are following all her recommendations.

As I was saying earlier, our colleagues across the way want to divert the debate in order to talk about things that are of interest to them, but not necessarily to Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

• (1215)

We spent the past two weeks in our respective ridings answering our constituents' questions. I can assure the House that in my magnificent riding of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, the economy and jobs are still top of mind. We are living in a time when the economy is doing so well that there is a labour shortage. That is what I am hearing from the entrepreneurs that I talk to. How can we support them even more? Of course, implementing the measures in the budget will benefit them especially.

Here are some examples. Our government has invested some \$90 million in the riding in the past 28 months, that is since I was and we were elected in 2015. That level of investment had not been seen for many years. I am very proud of the investments made in various areas. Consider, for example, the Maurice Lamontagne Institute, an ocean research centre in my riding. It is a wonderful institute that falls under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Its dedicated staff of public servants is hard at work studying what is going on in the St. Lawrence River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We have invested \$27 million to ensure that the institute has the infrastructure needed to carry out its research. Those investments will also help the institute hire several researchers.

Those are some of the important investments being made in my region. People were particularly proud when we announced them because research centres, including that one, did not receive any support from the previous government for 10 years. We have chosen to invest in research in order to have sound evidence.

We also invested several million dollars to upgrade the wharves in my riding. In fact, I recently announced funding for the Carleton-sur-Mer wharf, a wonderful piece of infrastructure that had unfortunately been deprived of investments for the 10 previous years.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I think a point of order is appropriate here. I have been listening to my colleague for about 10 minutes now, and he has been talking about what his government is doing with the country's finances. I believe we are supposed to be debating the conflicts of interest this government has been a party to for the past year. The Prime Minister has essentially been accused of breaking a federal statute. I think that is what we should be talking about. We moved an amendment to refer the matter to Canada's Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to get some suggestions for how to address the flaws in the legislation. I think the member across the way should stick to the issue at hand.

• (1220)

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou's comments. Interventions should, of course, be relevant to the matter before the House. However, I listened to the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia. He made a number of remarks and discussed a number of topics that are certainly relevant. He introduced the topic then made a number of arguments in support of the topic of his speech.

The hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia has two more minutes of speaking time. I will give him the floor.

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my colleague did not hear because he was busy doing something else. For several minutes and from the outset of this debate, I spoke openly about the issue, which has been raised yet again. This is something we debated and about which there were many questions in the House. As I already said, the Prime Minister has always been quite open and transparent. He answered all the questions. The former commissioner, in her report and testimony before the committee, answered many questions about this. We stated that we are here again today to debate this issue even though the Prime Minister has already answered all the questions. As soon as the commissioner's report was tabled, the Prime Minister said that he respected the findings of the report and that he accepted all the recommendations.

Once again, the Conservatives want to divert the debate and talk about other things, which, in our view, are not important to Canadians. Canadians want us to talk about the economy, jobs, investments in infrastructure, and how to enhance the development of first nations so we can invest in their communities. That is why we are here. Those are the questions I am asked when I am in my riding. I did not hesitate to participate in this debate in the context of the discussions we had. I believe that I gave good answers and participated appropriately in today's debate.

[*English*]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hear the Liberals saying that they want to debate the budget. On this side we are more than happy, ready, and able to debate the failed Liberal budget. We are willing to debate it right now if the Liberals would stop filibustering this motion, allow the debate to collapse right now, and put it to a vote. Then we could get on with the budget debate.

Will the member agree to let the debate collapse right now, so we can go to the budget debate right now?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, this is interesting. We must focus on what is important to Canadians. The Conservatives are the ones who want to continue to debate the subject of today's motion. Once again, this is a topic that we have debated and discussed at length. The Prime Minister has answered all of the questions. We also want to be able to discuss the budget, and I talked about this earlier for 10 minutes or so. It is important and we want to talk about it. Unfortunately, the Conservatives are playing politics yet again to prevent us from discussing the budget.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to get back to what my colleague just said. I promise my friend from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia that if, at the end of his speech and after questions and comments, the member for Madawaska—Restigouche does not rise, no members on this side of the House will rise to speak to the motion. This means that those of us on this side of the House are prepared to vote to dispose of the motion.

Can my colleague guarantee that, after questions and comments, the member for Madawaska—Restigouche will not rise, allowing the question to be put?

• (1225)

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying earlier, we, on this side of the House, want to debate the budget. We have been wanting to do so since 10 a.m. but unfortunately the members opposite moved a motion that we are debating again today. The motion is on a subject that has been raised multiple times and on issues that have already been submitted by the opposition parties and that the Prime Minister has already responded to. We want to debate the budget because that is important to Canadians. Unfortunately, we are unable to do so because the Conservatives decided to move a motion and we have to debate that instead.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question goes back to a point that was raised earlier about the relevance of what my colleague was talking about. What he talked about in his speech was entirely germane to the discussion. This is what we are faced with. This government has proposed a progressive budget that Canadians are responding well to and the only response to that from the opposition is to attack the Prime Minister or members of cabinet personally, as we have seen them do for a couple of years now.

What does my colleague think are the really important issues that Canadians want us to be dealing with in here as opposed to the motion that we are dealing with right now?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his usual excellent question.

As I was saying earlier, rather than debating the types of subjects the Conservatives are bringing forward, we should be talking about subjects that are of interest to Canadians, such as the economy, jobs, investments in infrastructure, and support for families. That is what Canadians want to hear us talking about. That is what they talk to me about when I am in my riding and I have a chance to talk with my constituents. We have achieved real results. We have created 600,000 jobs in recent months and years and the unemployment rate in Canada is the lowest it has been since 1976. Those are real results and that is what Canadians want to hear about.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's contribution here today; however, I must say that it is completely at the discretion of the government and government members as to how they respond to a motion.

The third party as well as the official opposition have said many times that if we want to have a vote on this, we just have to stop talking. The Liberals are accusing us of playing games but the only game being played is they are standing to talk over and over again. They do not even have the self-awareness to understand that when they say it is our fault, all they have to do is sit down. Let us do just that. Let us sit down. Would the member agree and allow this to go to a voice vote?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, it is rather surprising. The Conservatives moved a motion on a certain subject and now they no longer want to talk about it. We are here to talk about an important subject and we want to be able to debate it. We want to be able to discuss it. As we said, the Prime Minister has spoken about this many times. Now, the Conservatives no longer want to debate the issue in their motion. I find that rather unusual.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am the one who moved the motion earlier today, but we have heard very clearly from all sides. We have had a good discussion about “The Trudeau Report” and about the fact that the Ethics Commissioner needs to have the ability to close some loopholes. We have had a great discussion about that and I would agree that we can move on now and talk about the budget.

With that in mind, I believe that if you seek it, Mr. Speaker, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That, notwithstanding any standing orders or usual practices of the House, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion currently under debate to concur in the report of the Ethics Commissioner entitled “The Trudeau Report” tabled on Monday, January 19, 2018, be deemed put, recorded divisions be deemed requested and deferred to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment today, and that the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

• (1230)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. opposition House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to debate the matter before us this morning. This is a very awkward attempt by the opposition to avoid talking about the real and present concerns of the great citizens of this big, beautiful country.

First of all, people who were here before us and before this Parliament decided to put in place mechanisms to address the actions of MPs or cabinet ministers that put them in a conflict of interest, either because they did something or because they did not. That is why the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner was created. I am not an expert in the history of Parliament's officers, but they existed prior to my arrival and this Parliament.

Routine Proceedings

Today, the Conservatives and the NDP are asking us to vote on a motion that would tell the Ethics Commissioner to go back to the drawing board and to spice up the report in order to draw Canadians' attention away from the things that really concern them. To my knowledge, that has never been done in this country.

The Ethics Commissioner's report was published on December 20. It was tabled here in the House in January 2018 and gained a lot of media attention. Every Canadian has access to this extremely well-written, comprehensive legal report. Every Canadian who is so inclined can read it and understand all the detailed findings of the commissioner.

Last summer, I covered roughly 3,500 km by bike in my very rural riding. As an MP, I knocked on every door that I could to ask people whether they had any concerns about the country and the government that I might bring back to Ottawa on their behalf. Not one person in any of these discussions mentioned this trip. However, every question, concern, and compliment had to do with last year's budget. The government's budget has a daily impact on the future of our children, our peers, our co-workers, and all Canadians. That is what our constituents want to talk about.

After the Minister of Finance tabled his budget, I held two public meetings back home, and I did not get any questions about the trip to the Aga Khan's island, because the issue had been dealt with. The Prime Minister co-operated at every stage of the investigation. The report was tabled, period. Time to turn the page.

What is going to put food on my table tomorrow morning? How am I going to pay for my kids' education? What is going to give my family and friends equal opportunities to succeed in life? The budget is what matters and what Canadians want to talk about. They do not want to dwell on something from the past that has been resolved by a parliamentary body, specifically the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. They do not want to hear about a decision that is a done deal. It is all in the report; it is all there. Why, then, does the opposition still want to debate this today? Because it does not want to talk about the unemployment rate, the lowest rate in over a generation, incidentally. The Conservatives and NDP do not want to talk about that, particularly the NDP, who said during the election campaign that they wanted to balance the budget at all costs, without any hope of creating the level of economic development created by the current government.

Last year, contractors and truck drivers and backhoe operators were at work in every city and town in my riding. I am generalizing, of course, but that is thanks to the budget, which is having a positive impact on the country's economy and giving more Canadians a chance to earn a living. That is empowering. People know that a better future is attainable.

• (1235)

The Conservatives certainly do not want to talk about that. They love to toot their own horn and proclaim themselves the best budgeteers this country has ever known, so why would they talk about the Harper government's disastrous nine and a half years that ended with a \$121-billion debt and a sky-high unemployment rate, leaving us trapped in dire economic straits? Why would they bring that up? Why would they compare their disastrous, decade-long failure to perform with a government that, in less than two and a half

years, brought unemployment to its lowest level ever? Why? Because it would be embarrassing for them, really, really embarrassing.

I would like to talk about what this budget does for my region. That is what people want to talk about. There is money earmarked to combat spruce budworm, but the Conservatives do not care about that. The spruce budworm is attacking forests in my riding. The forestry industry in Atlantic Canada alone is worth \$4 billion to the economy. The Conservatives might not think that is worth talking about, but we do. That is what people want us to talk about.

What does this massive investment in research to tackle the spruce budworm in Atlantic Canada mean? It means we are protecting the \$4 billion generated annually by the forestry industry. That is the kind of thing we want to talk about.

What does the Canada workers benefit mean for low-income workers? The Conservatives do not want to talk about it because they do not give a damn. In my little home province of New Brunswick alone, this benefit will put about \$66 million more into the pockets of low-income workers over the next five years. Think about what that means financially on a national scale. That is millions of dollars. The Conservatives and NDP do not want to talk about that either. They want to sidetrack the budget debate. We are wasting a day by not talking about what Canadians need to hear to guide or reorient their career and their future, to enable them to reach their full potential on the labour market and in education, and to ensure that our youth stay in our rural areas. No, they do not want to talk about that, because it would embarrass them.

By way of example, in the current budget, \$250 million has been allocated to small craft harbours. The Conservatives do not want to talk about that. This affects every region on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Money is being injected into small fishing communities. We want to talk about that today because it affects our young people, but the Conservatives do not want to talk about it.

In short, I think it is unfortunate that the two opposition parties are resorting to such low tactics to try to avoid talking about an issue that affects the daily lives of Canadians, of our brothers and sisters, our cousins, our families, our residents. Instead of talking about real issues, the opposition moved a motion to try to dictate to an ethics commissioner, to an independent body of Parliament, how to rewrite her report and add things that will serve the interests of the Conservative and New Democratic parties. I think that is unfortunate.

Today, I would ask the opposition parties to truly speak on behalf of their constituents and focus on much more important things, because the issue of the Prime Minister's trip to the Aga Khan's private island has already been thoroughly addressed.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I never thought I would say this, but the Liberals' strategy of avoiding talking about the budget is putting Machiavelli to shame. All morning, the Liberals have been talking about nothing but the budget, with just a slight mention of the amendment that they would like to vote on as quickly as possible.

I have two choices. One, I can respect the decorum in this House and talk about the motion at hand, which is what I think the Liberals should be doing. Two, I can use this opportunity to say that the Liberals' strategy may be another way to prevent the opposition from talking about the budget and from pointing out that the budget does nothing to close the growing gap between the rich and those who are struggling to make ends meet. The government is doing little to meet our greenhouse gas reduction targets. I could talk about this for 20 minutes.

My question is even simpler than that. Can we discuss the topic that was brought up this morning? Better yet, since there is broad consensus, unless the Liberals want to continue with their strategy, we should vote on this amendment, deal with this issue, and debate the budget, since I also have a lot to say about the budget.

● (1240)

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, in answer to my colleague, I might be more tempted to get behind team Machiavelli than team Pinocchio.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. René Arseneault: What I mean is that, as I have said, we have been trying to talk about the budget since 10 o'clock this morning.

I have no desire, personally or as a member of the government, to tell the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner how to write a report. Her report could not have been more clear. If the members opposite have failed to understand it, I may be willing to meet with them personally to discuss it further; it really is very well put together. Let us now move on to the budget.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is demonstrating bad faith in suggesting that we do not want to talk about the budget. Earlier, as I was asking his colleague a question, I said that if he kept quiet and did not rise, nobody else on this side of the House would rise either. Accordingly, as per our rules, the debate would have gone to a vote immediately. There would have been a vote and we could have moved on to the item on the agenda, which is the budget. Clearly, my colleague's insistence on continuing to talk is preventing us from getting back to the debate on the budget, Bill C-74.

Why did my colleague rise when he could have kept quiet so the question could be put immediately?

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, my response to my colleague from Sherbrooke is that, since 10 o'clock this morning, we were supposed to be discussing the budget in the House. That was what was planned. How, then, did this issue get turned around and why is the opposition saying that we do not want to talk about the budget and that we are doing this to delay debate on the budget, when this is quite simply an official opposition tactic? This is outrageous, and I hope that Canadians are listening to this debate and listening closely,

because since 10 o'clock this morning, they have been wanting to hear about what matters to their daily lives.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an amazing day when we hear the opposition asking that we please stop debating something because they want to vote on it. Why would they bring forward a motion unless they wanted a healthy debate?

Part of that debate, at least to me, is what the opposition parties deem to be more important than the priorities of the government, the very serious issues facing the people of Canada, and what they want to see us in here talking about.

What does the member see as the important things in his community that would supersede this discussion that is going on today? What are people actually talking about, and how important is it to him that we get on with talking about the budget and the progressive agenda of this government?

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

As I was saying earlier, I hosted two public meetings after the most recent budget was tabled. As an MP, I went door to door to meet people and talk about our country's situation and our government's policies. People want to talk about what affects their daily lives, like the fact that the Canada child benefit will be indexed one year earlier than planned. This affects them, and those are the kinds of things people often talk to me about. Another thing people want to talk to me about is the Canada workers benefit, intended for low-income workers. This has a direct impact on their lives.

● (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my remarks in opposition to this motion by reminding each and every one of us that we are elected here as members of Parliament to do a job, and that a significant part of that job is to listen attentively to our constituents, to bring their comments and priorities back to this House, and to debate and advance them in meaningful ways by delivering results.

A motion like the one that has been put forward by the opposition this morning is not about elevating ethical standards. It is about obstructing the meaningful delivery of the results that this government is working on, day in and day out. When the opposition members heckle us and say, "Why not just vote?", we are not going to surrender to an opposition motion that has more than a poison pill in it, which has been debated vigorously in many other failed attempts by the opposition Conservatives to stop the priorities of the people from being advanced to this House. We on this side are going to continue to defend them.

During the last two non-sitting weeks, like many other members in this chamber, I went out and knocked on doors, and met with business leaders and students. It may come as a bit of a shock to some of my Conservative friends and colleagues, but not a single one of them raised the subject of this motion.

Routine Proceedings

My constituents were asking about the economy. They were asking about how we are going to continue to create jobs at a record pace. They were asking about our relationship with our good friends south of the border, and NAFTA. They were asking about how we are going to continue to keep the privacy of Canadians safe in light of the many important and significant developments we have seen in social media. They were asking how we are going to keep to our campaign commitments to protect our communities and rid them of gun violence, and this is something I have spoken on very recently in this House.

They also asked how we are going to protect the environment and develop our natural resources in a way that is sustainable. They asked how we can do more to provide support for our veterans, which I know is something my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, is working on every day. Last, they asked how this government can make improvements to ensure that every Canadian gets access to the justice he or she deserves.

For all the noise we hear in this chamber, I know I am not the only one who is discouraged by the way the debate has been oversimplified and become redundant and non-productive through the repetitious, mechanistic way in which we approach question period. Notwithstanding all those efforts at obstruction and impeding progress, I know this government has done incredible work and is making significant progress on the priorities I just stated.

How do we know that? Let us look at the economy. We have record job growth.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Relevance is important, and I believe the member has strayed too long and too far from the relevance of the motion before the House.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove for his reminder to the House of the importance of relevance. This has come up earlier in the course of this debate, and it is not always an easy one to rule on, because one actually has to hear the remarks and commentary from the hon. member before one can make that determination. Therefore, it is not one that we can usually rule on with a great degree of precision.

I am noting that the member is about four minutes into his 20-minute speech, and he has introduced ideas that to this point at least, from my hearing of what he has had to say, follow and are relevant to the subject before us. I will pay close attention. I encourage the hon. member to frame his remarks in that regard, and we will let him carry on.

● (1250)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. colleague does not want us to talk about the budget because he supports an opposition motion which is designed to prevent the debate around that motion.

However, if members recall, and I hope that my hon. colleague was listening, I framed all of my remarks in the context of juxtaposing the priorities of the opposition Conservatives, which is to delay, impede, and obstruct the real priorities of Canadians. This is an obvious effort at delay. It is not about elevating the standard of ethics in this House. We know that. At every opportunity, the Conservatives will stand up and try to stop us from creating jobs and

from lowering unemployment. We cannot stand for that. It is too important.

When the government was elected, this country was at an all-time weak and low point of growth, the worst since the Great Depression. We have turned it around. That is exactly what our constituents are talking about in my riding, and I believe many of my colleagues are hearing the same thing. We want to keep the momentum going.

This opposition motion is not the first time that the Conservatives have tried to stray the government and take public attention away from the hard and good work that is being done by the government. We saw it a little over two weeks ago when the opposition Conservatives brought forward a needless and unnecessary filibuster. What was the opportunity that we were deprived of back then? We were deprived of the precious time to debate how we can rid our communities of gun violence. This is something that has touched the people of my riding on a very personal level. At a family establishment where I take my two girls like many other parents, less than a month ago, we saw two people's lives lost as a result of gun violence.

If we cannot address the scourge of gun violence through organized crime in this chamber, then we are not living up to the high standards that Canadians demand of this place. This goes back to my point about raising the level of debate in this chamber, doing away with the kind of filibustering and redundant motions we see here. Let us have a debate. Let us have a thoughtful debate on the substantive merits of our policy, of our legislative agenda.

I encourage my Conservative colleagues to come forward with ways we can improve our legislation, but they do not do that. They instead choose to find ways to prevent us from talking about the budget. There are a few things that I want to highlight from the 2018 budget which we ought to have been debating this morning and this week, but we are now being deprived of that opportunity as a result of the Conservative motion. To assure my colleagues, I will come back to address the words of the motion in their expressed form in due course.

What should we be talking about to advance the priorities I am hearing about from my constituency in Eglinton—Lawrence? How do we provide support for that economic growth that I referred to before? There are a number of things that the 2018 budget implementation bill will do to advance those goals which matter to my constituents, like introducing the Canada workers benefit. We all know that many Canadians, notwithstanding the significant progress we have made in the last few years, are continuing to struggle. We are responsive to those concerns.

We introduced a number of mechanisms prior to the 2018 budget, which I think all members should be celebrating, including the introduction of the Canada child benefit. That is helping millions of Canadians and families. It has lifted approximately 300,000 children out of poverty. It has contributed to our economic growth, the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Part of that ongoing conversation about how we can provide support to low-income earners has given rise to the creation of a new Canada workers benefit.

Routine Proceedings

●(1255)

This budget will ensure that we increase both maximum benefits and the income level at which the benefit is phased out. As a result, a low-income worker earning \$15,000 could receive up to almost \$500 more in 2019. That is an important and meaningful increase. That means that the parents I speak to in my riding, in a community like Lawrence Heights or Lotherton, who I often engage with, will be able to provide student supplies, or perhaps send their child to child care or an extracurricular activity. These are important conversations. We would not be bogged down in going back over covered terrain with respect to the kinds of motions being brought forward this morning.

My other colleagues who have spoken against this motion this morning have raised the fact that we cannot be complacent when it comes to the Canada child benefit plan. We have proposed in the 2018 budget to index it, so we can keep pace with the increases to the standard of living and the costs, which are something we have to be very vigilant about.

Another topic I have heard a lot about over the course of the last two weeks, and for quite some time, is how we can create the conditions which are conducive for small and medium-sized businesses. This is something my Conservative colleagues often trumpet. They are the great champions of small business. This government, in keeping with its campaign pledge, is lowering taxes for small businesses. If we cannot debate the budget, which I know the Conservatives do not want us to do, then that is potentially one more day that a small business owner in my riding will not be able to avail themselves of a lower, more competitive corporate tax and business tax regime. Therefore, I call upon my opposition colleagues to think about their own rhetoric when it comes to being the great champions of industry, enterprise, and small business, and to live up to those commitments by debating the merits of the policy, not by filibustering, by wasting time, and by bringing motions like the one we have seen this morning.

I also mentioned that among the many priorities I have heard in the last two non-sitting weeks was the ongoing conversation we are having about how to protect our environment while at the same time getting our natural resources to export markets in a sustainable way. I have listened very carefully to my colleagues in the Conservative ranks. I respect their passion and I understand their frustration. We want to see every single Canadian and sector succeed and thrive.

For the life of me, I do not understand why we see members of the other side resorting to the hyperbolic exaggerated comments that are so completely divorced from reality. These are blanket statements, such as, “this government does not believe in” or “does not care”, or most recently and alarmingly from a former colleague of my friends on the opposite side of the aisle, “Canada is broken.” Canada is not broken. Canada is the greatest country in the world. We are very fortunate to live in this country. We should not be resorting to that kind of negative rhetoric, which undermines confidence in public institutions like this one right here. Do we have our disagreements from time to time? Absolutely. Do we have fundamental disagreements on policy? Without question. That is healthy in a democracy. However, to see the kind of stoking of division and fear—

●(1300)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order with respect to relevance, the member continues to talk about something that was debated last night. I am having flashbacks to the Trans Mountain emergency debate, and perhaps he should have given that section of his speech last night.

I understand that we are here to discuss the motion before the House and the amendment. Therefore, if the member could discipline himself and focus on what we are here to discuss, I think we would all greatly benefit from his contribution.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention on the issue. I have been listening to the hon. parliamentary secretary on his remarks on the issue. I note that we have approximately six minutes remaining in his time and that he indicated he was going to specifically reference back to the motion before the House.

To a great degree, one of the issues that has been part of the discussions today, particularly from members speaking against the amendment before the House, is the notion that the premise, if you will, of the interruption in what had been scheduled for debate today and is now put forward with the motion and the amendment before the House, represents an intervention in what would have otherwise been a different kind of debate. I appreciate that is a premise upon which members have some strong arguments to make. I will note that I will certainly make an allowance for that kind of debate, as long as they make that connection and reference it specifically to examples of how that creates difficulty for debate and the arguments they are trying to put forward in opposition to the amendment.

If the member will proceed on that basis, and again with specific reference to the motion before the House, we will carry on with the next five minutes of his remarks.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I know you have been listening throughout my presentation. I have been interposing my remarks to make the point that we are not going to allow this motion to hijack the government's agenda relative to the substantive premise of the opposition motion. What is relevant about that is that any Canadian listening to this debate would hear that notwithstanding the efforts to delay and filibuster, we have our priorities right on this side of the House. I am spending an appropriate and proportionate amount of time devoted in my presentation to the priorities that matter. That is relevant for the purposes of understanding why we reject this motion. Perhaps the Conservatives want us to allow ourselves to be hijacked and not talk about these things. However, we are not going to surrender to that kind of false logic. Nor should we.

Let me round out my highlights in my remaining moments. I will come back to the very express language of the opposition motion, then conclude my remarks.

Routine Proceedings

The trouble with the rhetoric we have heard from some of the members of the Conservative family is that it stokes fear. It stokes anger and division among Canadians. We live in a very broad, diverse country, but those different experiences all get reconciled in the chamber. We find ways as members of Parliament to be the voice for our local communities. At the same time, we take into consideration how Canadians in different parts of the country, in different provinces and territories go about living their lives and pursue opportunities and prosperity to provide for their children and families. This is the place where we can accomplish that. This is the place where we can balance those competing interests and priorities. If we cannot do it here, we cannot do it anywhere.

Therefore, I call on my Conservative colleagues to debate as passionately when it comes to natural resources, but also to remember this is an institution that does deliver for Canadians.

The last highlight I want to mention is a priority that is not in the budget but is one that matters to me, and that is Bill C-75, which was tabled before our two non-sitting weeks. The bill proposes to make significant reforms to the criminal justice system by reducing delay and by ensuring we are reducing systemic barriers to victims so they can come forward, have their stories heard, and get the justice they deserve. We cannot get to that business if we see these kinds of dilatory motions brought forward today by the Conservatives.

My Conservative colleagues are cheering me. We should have the record reflect that some colleagues are putting up their hands in adoration and praise. They are enjoying some of my remarks. They may not enjoy what follows, but one takes credit where one can get it.

There is a fundamental flaw with the opposition motion. We just heard the House leader for the Conservative Party say that it has been vigorously debated, then some jockeying back and forth about why not just let debate collapse. The motion proposes to tell the Ethics Commissioner what his job is. Unlike other parties in the House, this government respects the independence of the officers of the chamber to do their jobs and fulfill their responsibilities in a way that ensures Canadians can have confidence in the high ethical standards they demand of their parliamentarians.

The motion purports to say what the fixes for the loopholes should be, and so on. We cannot prescribe expressly how the debate around ethical standards will evolve. We will listen to the Ethics Commissioner and obviously pay very close attention to whatever recommendations he or his office may put forward. In the meantime, as my Conservative colleagues will know very well, the Prime Minister and the government have accepted the findings of the report on numerous occasions. We have had well over 130 or 140 questions in question period regarding the report, the same question repeated over and over again.

● (1305)

To what end? Simply to waste time. Simply to obstruct and impede all of the significant priorities and the things that matter, which I have already discussed in my remarks. Canadians are going to judge us, but they are also going to judge the opposition Conservatives on how they have used their time in the chamber. What they will see is not constructive dialogue, not thoughtful

debate on jobs and the economy, on public safety, on trade. They are going to see obstruction.

Accountability is a two-way street. Canadians are watching the Conservatives very closely. I encourage them to withdraw this motion and let us get back to the business that matters.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to disagree a little with my colleague on his comments about what people at the door in Toronto are talking about today. They are talking about the Leafs' great win last night and only 15 more left to hoist that cup. There is no love from the Conservatives on that.

I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague. We have seen a pattern by the official opposition over the last number of weeks. Those members do not want to talk about the real issues facing the nation. They are in there to get these "gotcha" moments as opposed to talking about what is important. They are trying to distract the Canadian public.

I was at a rodeo a couple of years ago. When the bull is let loose out of the pen, the rodeo clown waves his arms and jumps up and down, but he will not distract the bull easily. Canadians are not distracted. They see 600,000 jobs created. They see an unemployment rate at its lowest in 40 years.

Would the member rather be dealing with those types of issues, debating legislation that impacts job creation and the well-being of Canadians, as opposed to this?

● (1310)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, unequivocally the answer is yes. We are debating those issues by ensuring Canadian families are getting more support through the Canada child benefit plan. We see that low-income workers are going to get more support through the creation of the workers' benefit. We see that we are responding to the need for more affordable housing.

My colleague, the member for Spadina—Fort York, along with the minister responsible, has been advocating through the national housing strategy, one of the first-ever of the federal government, the creation of over 100,000 new units. Why will the Conservatives and NDP members not join us on a debate on the merits of those issues instead of wasting time?

Last, but not least, go Leafs, go. We have 15 more to get there, but we are going to do it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Jets have not given up yet. We are still hoping to get 14 wins and possibly get to the Stanley Cup also. However, whether it is the Jets or the Leafs, I am Canada first and I will be cheering for the Canadian teams.

Routine Proceedings

One of the things I would like my colleague to discuss is the importance of town halls. I often hear many of our colleagues talk about going back to their constituents, about ensuring the interests of their constituents are being brought to Ottawa as opposed to interests of Ottawa going to their constituents. That is a high priority for Liberal caucus members.

The Prime Minister sets the stage. The motion is about calling into question the Prime Minister. For the first time in the modern era, we have a Prime Minister who goes out to all the different regions of our country to hold public town halls. That is one of the best ways to ensure accountability and transparency. We are answering direct questions from Canadians in all regions. I take a great deal of pride in what the government has achieved in two and a half years. We have been able to advance the importance of additional transparency and accountability.

Could my friend and colleague provide his thoughts on the importance of town halls and the type of feedback we possibly hear from those?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I agree and wholeheartedly endorse what my colleague says on the importance of town halls.

We saw the Prime Minister, over the course of the last two years and at the beginning of the year, which is a great way to kick off a new year, go out to every part of the country. He has travelled far and wide, from coast to coast to coast, to interact directly with Canadians, to take their questions. They are not asking about the subject of this motion. They are asking about jobs, growth, the environment, and trade. We are delivering on every one of those. I will speak about something else.

I believe there is a correlation between the degree to which this government is interacting, and Canadians with Canadians, like town halls hosted by the Prime Minister, and like town halls hosted by members of Parliament on this side of the House. Off the top of my head I do not know exactly how many, but it is in the double digits. We are going to continue to host those town halls to engage. Listening is as important as the rhetoric and the speaking we do in the House. There is no better way to do that than through town halls.

I thank my colleague for his comments regarding the Winnipeg Jets. If the Leafs go out, I am right behind them.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid I cannot make any comments about my beloved Habs. I certainly will not support the Leafs after five decades of not liking them, with my regrets to my hon. colleague.

I would like my hon. colleague to perhaps elaborate upon a subject which the opposition members are avoiding in these dilatory motions, and that is the whole innovation agenda that our government is putting forward, which will have a great benefit on every region of the country, rural and urban, and will propel Canada into the next economy for our young and old. If my hon. colleague has thoughts on that, I think we would like to hear them.

•(1315)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary for innovation, for the work

he is leading within this caucus, particular as an expert in the field of open data.

It is particularly relevant in light of some developments we have seen in social media. We need to understand and come to a full grasp of the importance of protecting Canadians' privacy, so their choices are informed when they engage in social media in every facet of life, whether it is through commerce or trade or simply through expression. It is important for the government to be informing the protection and a modern understanding of open data in a completely evolved social media sense.

In addition to that, the minister and the parliamentary secretary are also creating superclusters, which we see right across the country. For example, the ocean supercluster out east will create jobs for Newfoundland and Labrador, and for my maritime colleagues. I have heard nothing but praise for the concept of bringing together a hub of innovation, growth, and prosperity. That is being led by my colleague, the parliamentary secretary to the minister. Kudos for that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to pick up on my friend's comments on the importance of jobs.

While the opposition wants to take on personal attacks, whether it is the Prime Minister or the minister, or backbenchers, our government is focused on the economy. Nowhere is it better illustrated than in the number of jobs that have been created in the last two and a half years. That is increasing strength for our economy, our middle class, those who are working hard to be a part of the middle class, and those who just need that helping hand.

Could he comment specifically about the quantity of jobs that have been created?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to jobs growth, the numbers we cite often are quite staggering: 600,000 new jobs since taking office, record low unemployment, and the fastest growing GDP in the G7. It is one thing to cite these aggregate numbers, but in my community, we are looking at creating upward of 1,000 jobs through the summer jobs program.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Wow.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Conservative colleague for cheering. I will celebrate that result. I will celebrate the result our government is creating when it comes to job growth in his riding. I hope he will join us in doing the same.

It comes down to this. The crux of the motion brought forward by the opposition Conservatives has its priorities reversed. Canadians will reject it. They want us to stay focused on jobs and growth. We are going to do that. We are going to vote down the motion and get back to the priorities that matter.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to participate in this debate, as all debates afford us an opportunity to make our positions and perspectives known, not only to members opposite but also to the constituents and residents we represent back in our home ridings.

I will provide context for those who might be listening in different parts of the country right now about what happened today. The Conservative Party, as an opposition party, is afforded the opportunity through the parliamentary process to set the agenda for a day's debate so that it is not just government members who bring forward the agenda in this place. We all have the opportunity to raise issues that are fundamental to the quality of life and the good standing of our citizens, and to make sure that the priorities of the country are not set solely by the government but are set by all parliamentarians.

There are an allotted number of days, which are very important days in the parliamentary calendar. The opposition quite often studies several issues, puts two or three of those issues, and focuses attention and builds momentum toward those debates. Those priorities not only define their perspective on what constitutes an important issue for this country, but, in presenting them to the Canadian public through Parliament, the members believe these are actually the most fundamental issues that their party wishes to discuss on any given day.

We have seen these motions have great effect on government and on the history of this country. I remember that, in the previous term, the NDP brought forth a motion to eliminate sales tax on feminine hygiene products, and it changed government policy. It was a profoundly mature and wise use of parliamentary motions, and the government of the day, having had this motion presented to it several times, one day decided to finally listen and act on it. Lo and behold, a motion from the opposition became government policy, and we changed the quality of life and affordability for many Canadians as a collective group. In fact, we voted unanimously on that motion.

On another issue, I commend the member for Calgary Nose Hill, who, since becoming an opposition member, has been a very strong advocate for refugees from the Middle East, and in particular the plight of Yazidi women. That member brought forward a motion that brought attention to the issue and said that there should be special measures taken to address a very particular part of the population of 25,000 refugees that we brought into the country, which was a number opposed by the opposition parties but supported by the government. As a government, we responded in a way that we hope satisfied the opposition. Apparently, it did. However, when we actually moved forward to provide support for the refugees once they arrived, the party opposite voted against it, which is a very strange approach to settling refugees. Nonetheless, I will let the party opposite explain its hypocrisy on that issue.

The fundamental fact is that when the opposition has this opportunity to focus debate in the House, and focus it for Canadians, it is not just a question of how we assess the proposition brought forward by the opposition members. Canadians can also assess the party opposite as to what it prioritized as the most pressing issue of

the day and of the moment. Members of the party opposite are more interested in playing parliamentary games and rehashing previous issues, which have already been reported on in Parliament, than actually advancing any issue of a particular riding or a particular group of people in this country, or a particular domestic or international issue.

The priority set by the party opposite is in fact so pointless that the opposition House leader, within minutes of introducing it, stood up and asked us not to talk about it. What a strange course of events for this day. The party opposite stands up and says that this is the most important issue facing Canada, and then says that we do not really need to talk about it, and to please go on to what was originally scheduled. What is the point? I am lost in figuring out what exactly the point is. What I do know is that if we had moved closure on the debate, those members would have gone berserk, saying they have a right to be heard.

As Liberals stand up here and address the issue that has been raised, we are being told to please sit down and stop talking about it. We would rather talk about what the government sees as a set of priorities, which is the budget. Quite frankly, that is the priority for this country.

What the budget has done is transformational in so many sectors of this country. It is a wonder that opposition members do not seize on one of those and try to make it a better idea, but they are not interested. They are not interested in figuring out how the Canada child benefit, which lifts close to 300,000 families out of poverty, might be extended to reach even more. In fact, the NDP opposition raised a very good point in committee, which is that the benefit was not indexed. When we brought in a proposal to index it in a few years, they said that it was not good enough. This government listens, because if one listens, one leads better. We listened to the opposition, and we improved the Canada child benefit in this budget.

Is the Conservative Party interested in extending the reach of anti-poverty measures? No. Is it interested in making sure kids get the help they need to succeed in this country? No.

● (1320)

What those members see as a priority is effectively something they do not even talk about, and that is why the opposition House leader just tried to quash the debate. They care so little about their issue that they cannot even hold together as a caucus and support the debate. They are not even participating in the debate, except to interrupt and ask us to talk about something they do not want us to talk about, or stop talking about something they do not want us to talk about, or stay on point by sitting down and just letting the whole debate collapse. That is what they are doing. Is this not confusing?

Those of us who have sat in Parliament a little longer than one term know that it is simply a frustration and delay point to slow down the progress of the government. That is fine. That is the job of the opposition. Some do it on principle, and some do it with a great deal of democratic flair and debating prowess.

Routine Proceedings

All they have done is introduce a motion and ask us not to talk about it. That is the extent of their imagination. That is the extent of their national vision. That is the extent of their capacity to care for vulnerable Canadians. The Conservatives would rather talk about a report that has already been tabled in Parliament and that has already been acted on and accorded with. They would rather rehash an issue that took place a year ago than talk about what is happening today or tomorrow in this country. Shame on them.

As I said, when opposition parties are afforded this parliamentary privilege to talk about the issues of the day that matter, to talk about precisely the most critical issue in their perspective, they will be judged not just by this Parliament but by Canadians. If Canadians are that focused on this issue, quite frankly, I have not come across it when I go door to door, hold town hall meetings, do radio and television panels, or communicate in any number of ways with my constituents or Canadians across the country. What I hear about is the challenges facing those Canadians yet to receive the help that this Parliament needs to deliver to them.

For example, we have a report in the city of Toronto showing that after 10 years of failed housing policy in this country—

• (1325)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Durham.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hate to interrupt my friend in full rhetorical flight, but he is not debating relevant points to the motion today.

The Liberal Party used to run on slogans like “Better is always possible.” What is being debated here is the suggestion that we could be better with the ethics laws in Canada. We could learn from the findings of the last Ethics Commissioner with respect to the Prime Minister and certain loopholes. That is what this is about. I have not heard the member refer to that. I have heard him complain a lot about this debate. He seems to have glossed over the fact that the House leader of our party asked for unanimous consent to move forward. If he is going to speak, he should at least speak to the relevance of what is before the chamber.

If the member thinks the ethics report against the Prime Minister's conduct is a waste of time, he should tell us why. Canadians want to know that the Prime Minister will learn from the finding, the first finding of this kind against a sitting Prime Minister in the history of our country. It is the position of the opposition that we could actually learn from that and close some of the loopholes that were identified as a result of this long investigation. We now know that the veterans affairs minister is entangled in this crisis as well.

If the member does not want to speak to ethics, and considering he is a Liberal MP I am not surprised he does not want to, he should at least try to speak to some element of this debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. member rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, it is on a matter of privilege. I would like the hon. member opposite, who has just questioned my ethical standards and behaviour solely because of the political party I belong to, to withdraw that comment. It is a comment unbecoming of any—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary can take a seat momentarily and we will get to his point. From what I could gather, it was a response to the point of order that was raised by the hon. member for Durham. It seemed to me that this was a matter of debate. We are going to come back to the hon. parliamentary secretary momentarily. He will have the opportunity to address that.

On the point of order that was raised by the hon. member for Durham, this issue came up earlier in the day. When hon. members feel that they need to intervene and raise these points about what they fear has been a contravention of the Standing Orders with respect to relevance, we certainly welcome that. I will say that this particular debate today has been crossing into what members might best describe as process arguments, arguments about the process of debate as much as, or probably more than, the topic that is in fact before the House.

Earlier, I encouraged the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice to make sure that before one is prepared to argue on those points of process, the two are in fact tied together. I did hear the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development make that connection early on in his argument. We will allow some freedom for him to continue in that vein.

At the same time, I would encourage members to recall that the motion or the amendment that is before the House is quite specific, and members should be addressing their remarks to that. They can pose the process arguments, and we will allow that, as long as they make that connection. However, we encourage members to ensure that at least the majority of their debate is in fact centred on the topic before the House.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

• (1330)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I will continue.

These motions set priorities, and they clearly identify the priorities of the party opposite. The member opposite just rose, and it shows the ridiculous position being asserted by the opposition. The party opposite says it wants to have a debate about this, but no member on their side, beyond introducing this motion, will stand to talk about it. If the opposition members had something to add to this debate, they would stand up, not on points of order but as participants in the debate. However, they are afraid to, because they know that what they are doing is ridiculous. What the opposition members are doing is sitting on their hands and asking us to stop talking. They say that the best way to prosecute this argument is not to talk about it. That is the fallacy in what is being presented here.

I will speak specifically to the issue that has been raised in the motion. The opposition members want us to effectively rewrite the entire process that they availed themselves of: to submit a complaint to an officer of Parliament, to get a finding from the officer of Parliament, and to condition the behaviour of a member of this House based on the finding of that officer of Parliament. Once the whole thing plays out, they suddenly say it is not good enough. They may have been in power for 10 years and never touched or changes these rules, but they are saying it is not good enough.

Routine Proceedings

There is no capacity we could fulfill that would ever be good enough for the opposition. Their job is not to agree with us. Their job is to disagree with us. That is fine. We can live with that. That is part of the parliamentary system.

However, the reality is that the officer of Parliament charged with investigating and delivering findings to this House has reported, and the person being investigated has responded and completely subjected himself to the findings of that report. The member opposite knows this full well. The opposition cannot even stand up and tell us a recommendation of the report that was not followed by the Prime Minister, because the truth of the matter is that the Prime Minister accepted those findings, and the case was closed. That is the end of it.

However, the party opposite wants to continually rehash and play *Groundhog Day* all over again. I do not blame it. It has no perspective, no priorities, and no other pressing issues in this country. All the opposition wants to do is play this record over and over again. The reality is that Canadians are listening to a completely different radio station right now. What they are listening to, what they are watching, and what they are focused on is how to build a stronger country and how to make sure that the vulnerable citizens in this country get the support they need, and those with ingenuity and imagination succeed. That is what the budget is all about.

The opposition members claim they want to talk about the budget, but the reality is that they could have done that today with one of their motions. If their priority really was helping those with ingenuity succeed or helping support those who are vulnerable, that is what their motion would have spoken to. The fact that it speaks to a finding of this Parliament that has already been tabled and debated is, as I said, beyond my capacity to understand.

I will continue to debate whether the motion in front of us is appropriate and whether it does anything to change the circumstances we are confronted with, which it does not. It does not one bit. If it did, one Conservative member would stand up and take his or her place in this debate. One member of that party would stand up and participate, without raising a point of order, by simply putting his or her name on the list of speakers.

The mere fact that the opposition House leader came in—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is awfully noisy in here today, and it is very difficult for even me to hear. I will ask for a little order. We are not taking away any time from the hon. parliamentary secretary at this moment. That is what happens sometimes when there is too much noise, so that other hon. members who might wish to hear what the hon. parliamentary secretary has to say have the chance to do so.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of a very similar event, and it is becoming a pattern with the party opposite, when a reference was made to a confidential briefing to the media that they thought meant classified when they knew it was not for attribution. The members opposite have journalists in their ranks. They know what not for attribution means. It does not mean classified information was handed across to journalists. Of course that did not happen. However, they deliberately choose to misunderstand

public, social, and professional conventions and torque them so they can have some sort of fantastical debate about something that has already been resolved.

This is instead of talking to the priorities of Canadians, priorities such as to which part of the country that next group of jobs is going to come; which industry is going to be supported by what government policy; vulnerable Canadians; people with disabilities who face challenges getting housing; people who are homeless who have trouble accessing emergency shelters; and senior citizens who cannot afford their prescription drugs. All these people have priorities that are not spoken to when the Conservative Party refuses to discuss the budget. Instead, the Conservatives come back with a whole series of fantastical arguments about issues that have already been resolved and decide to try to reintroduce the debate because for some reason that policy interests them more than any other policy or any other behaviour of any other Canadian in the country.

It is a sham. We can tell it is a sham because the Conservatives are not participating, except to stand on fanciful points of order and poke fingers at the other side. Big deal. If that is what they ran on to get to Parliament, if that was their ticket, vote for them and they will interrupt parliamentary procedure, if that was what their campaign platform was, they have fulfilled their promise, but let me tell them that is not much of a campaign platform for re-election. Parties that do that are listened to in a different way than parties that try to govern and contribute.

As I said, motions from the NDP have made a difference with government policy because they are mature, constructive criticism, and are engaged with investigation and research. The party opposite is just playing procedural politics. That is all it is doing. It is the same thing with the all-night vote. We might as well go back to the Pacific scandal and re-prosecute John A. Macdonald for all it is worth. The party opposite is focused on the past. It is focused on rehashing past scandals. Members of that party really do not care about individuals, their families, their communities, their provinces, or the country, because if they did, their motions would reflect that.

● (1335)

The Deputy Speaker: I am just rising to interrupt the noise in the chamber. I am not sure if the hon. parliamentary secretary was finished his remarks. He has about six and a half minutes remaining, so we will let him carry on. I will again appeal to hon. members. The noise in the chamber is too much and is ongoing. There is only one member recognized to speak at a time, and that is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, so we will let him get on with his remarks.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. The priorities of this government were reflected in the Order Paper today. What we want to talk about is the budget. What I would like to talk about, as the parliamentary secretary in particular responsible for housing, is that the \$40-billion national housing strategy, which was proudly put in last year's budget, has been added to in this year's budget. From now on, when the hon. members want to refer to the longest and most impressive investment in housing in the history of the country, it is no longer an investment of \$40 billion over the next 10 years, it is \$42 billion over the next 10 years. That is important because I have heard from constituents in virtually every city I have been to from coast to coast to coast over the last three years as a member of this House that housing is of fundamental importance to Canadians.

Whether it is the lack of ability to repair housing on the east coast, the affordability on the west coast, the challenges of homelessness in the centre of this country, or the high cost of housing in the north and in the territories, these issues are the real priorities Canadians want to have addressed. The budget addresses those issues, and if we could have a thorough debate on that, Canadians might tune in to this place. Instead, they have to watch the games that are played opposite.

As I said, the party opposite introduced this motion. The party opposite is begging us to stop talking about it. The party opposite does not want to talk about the budget. I can guarantee that if we were talking about the budget, the same silence we are hearing on this motion would be heard across the way because it is pretty clear that the party opposite really is not engaged in the budgetary process. The party opposite really is not engaged in making lives better for Canadians. The party opposite is engaged in playing politics for the sake of politics, and that kind of governance in this place is irresponsible.

I reference back again to opposition members in the third party who stand time and time again and offer constructive criticism to us. It is tough sometimes. It makes us stop and reflect on the policy positions we have taken. On indigenous affairs in particular, great leadership has been shown and partisanship has been set aside to put the interests of Canadians and indigenous people first.

The official opposition's voice is silent in those conversations because its members do not see a political wedge that they can play. They do not see a way of getting back to previous scandals that they think are fascinating but nonetheless resolved. What they are fundamentally involved in is politics for the sake of politics, government and acquisition of power for the sake of government and acquisition of power. They are not interested in Canadians. That is why they lost the last election. They drifted away from the core responsibility of a parliamentarian, which is not to use this place for political advantage but to use it to make Canadians' lives better. The absolute best test of that is the motion the Conservatives moved today. This motion is the most important thing they can think of to discuss. It has already been received by Parliament. It has already been responded to by the Prime Minister. It has already been adjudicated by the conflict of interest system. It has already been addressed. There is not a single recommendation in this report that has not been adhered to.

The problem on the opposite side is that those members have nothing else to talk about but the Prime Minister. I understand. It bugs them. It bugs them that they lost to a great Prime Minister, and that their prime minister was sent packing so fast that he left this House as soon as he was elected.

This is change. We are now focused on working with opposition members who want to constructively engage with us and make legislation better. We want to hear from Canadians and talk to Canadians about their priorities and make sure they are reflected in the budget. As for holding up newspapers and hiding behind the papers and the shame and the embarrassment, I can clearly see the member does not want to be embarrassed and blush—

● (1340)

The Deputy Speaker: I realize the hon. member was treading into an area perhaps that we try to avoid and that is the reference to the absence or the presence of members in the House, particularly individual members. I just caution the member on that.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I will not reference the fact that members opposite are reading the newspaper and not participating in the debate. I understand that to be unparliamentary. I withdraw those comments.

The issue is quite clear. Parliament has very few sitting days, and those sitting days are all precious and the priorities of our constituents matter deeply to each one of us. I know that to be true. I feel sorry for the members opposite who cannot bring their issues forward because their House leadership is more interested in playing stub-their-toe politics than in putting good, strong policies in front of this House and good, strong ideas in front of Parliament, so that all of us can debate and consider the needs of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The problem with this House sometimes is that it gets engaged in these games, these 20 hours of voting and histrionics around one scandal or another. As I said, if they want to go back and prosecute them all from Confederation, they can knock themselves out. We have a country to build. We have people to help. We have a government to run and a Parliament to be responsible to. I find it shocking that members of the party opposite think that this game does anything other than undermine their credibility. It has completely undermined their credibility. When the House leader stands up and says, "Here is a motion that requires debate; please do not talk about", and sits down and thinks that is being clever, I can assure members that Canadians will assess it in a very different way.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us get something very clear. The hon. colleague and an hon. colleague before him have stood up and said that the members of the opposition have not participated in this debate. The problem is those members have been filibustering and not allowing the members of the opposition to stand up and do that. This is the first time.

I have a simple question for our hon. colleague. There is a common sense motion before the House. Will the member of Parliament, our hon. colleague, allow us to get to a vote, and how will he be voting on this motion?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, once I have finished my speech, I will be waiting to vote, like every other member of Parliament.

I also know that if we moved closure on this debate, we would have a hue and cry from the members on the opposite side for upending the parliamentary process and not giving them the full right to speak.

The member opposite suggests that the Conservatives would like to speak to this motion, yet several times the Speaker has risen, looked down the bench, and not a single Tory has risen to his or her feet to talk about it, except when it offers a chance to raise a point of order or ask a question. We are not filibustering; we are simply responding to the request by the Speaker to speak to an issue which those members presented. If they do not like the fact that we are responding to the motion they moved, maybe they should not have moved it to begin with.

If they would like to get to the voting on this issue, then they can sit there patiently and stop interrupting with more questions. The more of us on this side—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask one more time. There is a common sense motion before the House. Now that the member has done his speech, now that the filibuster appears to be finished and the Conservatives can finally ask a question or actually talk to the motion, will the hon. colleague put the question to a vote and call in the members?

• (1345)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my colleagues on all sides of the House who continually stand up to participate in this debate, and quite clearly they have not exhausted their opinions on this.

The member opposite wants to know how I am going to vote on this. I will be voting against it. This issue has already been dealt with by Parliament. I want to explain why I am voting against it. It is effectively redundant. We have a process. The process has been followed. The process has been responded to respectfully by the Prime Minister. That is the process.

If the members opposite would like to have a whole new debate about government processes they did not bring in while they were in power, they are welcome to that conversation. However, having been asked to talk about this motion, and I have done nothing but talk about this motion, I will tell the member that I do not support it. It is redundant. It is pathetic. It is unnecessary. It is a waste of time. It is not the priority of Canadians.

I will vote on this motion and I will vote against it. However, I will also take this opportunity to express in the clearest terms how ridiculous the tactic of the Conservative Party is. The Conservatives introduced a motion they do not want us to debate. I hope Canadians are watching.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. friend for his passionate speech about this issue. I know my other hon. friend, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, was quite excited to hear about John A. Macdonald

during that speech, and that there should be more discussion of our former prime minister.

That being said, the hon. member rose on a point with respect to a pattern of behaviour. I had the opportunity to be at the public safety committee yesterday, where I witnessed again the members of the opposition question and undermine the motivation of a long-standing civil servant. It is a shameful activity and this pattern continues. This pattern is seen in this motion, which is telling an officer of Parliament how to do his or her job. I wonder if the hon. member could comment on this pattern of behaviour, what we are seeing, and how the Conservatives opposite are engaging in this debate.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, for a political party whose central belief seems to be that we do not like government, a whole bunch of them seem to like being in government. What is apparent is how much disrespect they have for the parliamentary process, parliamentary traditions, the law and the rule of Canada. Not a single Liberal has ever been led from their parliamentary seat in handcuffs, which certainly happened in the last term of Parliament, yet we get lectured on ethics.

Conservatives deliberately told Canadians where to vote, knowing that they could not vote where they were being directed to. That is the respect they have for Canadians. That is the same respect they have for the Supreme Court, the offices of Parliament, and for public servants. When they talk about the democratic values of the Conservative Party, it is that image that I have of a parliamentarian being led away in handcuffs, that memory of redirecting Canadians to polling stations that did not exist to deliberately thwart the democratic will of the people. That is the most scandalous thing I have ever seen in this Parliament, yet they sit there as if they have some sort of ethical high ground to stand on and lecture us from.

I repeat. This motion is so pointless, so useless, so without merit, that the party opposite that introduced it wants us to stop talking about it. Members should get that through their heads. The party that introduced this motion does not want to participate in the debate and would ask us to stop talking about it because it is pain for them. They should be careful of what they ask for.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is incredibly rich to sit here and listen to the member talk about ethics as being pointless, as useless. May I remind them that this was the government that said it would do things differently. Remember Canada, that better is always possible, that we will be held to the highest ethical standards? If they want to be held to the highest ethical standards, then vote. Vote right now.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, the ethical standards that we are being held to are the standards of the House. We have been held accountable, and we accept the ruling of the officer of Parliament. The previous government refused to do that. Whenever the courts or some other body ruled against it, the Prime Minister threw a little hissy fit, denounced the individuals in question, and ripped up everything from the rule of law to the Constitution. That is why Conservatives ended up in jail in the last term of Parliament; they had contempt for the democratic traditions of this country.

Routine Proceedings

The member opposite said that better is always possible. Of course it is. The House is made up of individuals from across this country. We are humans, and humans make mistakes. When they make mistakes, they are held to account. This government has accepted the findings of the officer of Parliament. It has acted on every single suggestion, recommendation, and response contained in that report, and has fulfilled its obligations to the House and the country. That is leadership, and that is being held to a higher standard. That is a marked difference from the party opposite that thinks common sense, when I come from Ontario—

• (1350)

The Deputy Speaker: We have time for one more question and response.

The hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member just said that the government has acted on every recommendation in the report, but there were no recommendations in the report. Could the member inform us if the Ethics Commissioner provided the Prime Minister with any private recommendations on his ethical conduct?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, that is a question between the Prime Minister and the officer of Parliament. The member opposite is free to pursue that. The reality is that the process we have is we cannot pretend there is a problem and then demand an inquiry about this pretend problem, and then demand that there be recommendations about the pretend problem that they perceive as being possibly in existence.

We know that there was a statement of facts in that report and that the officer of Parliament, who has the ability to provide recommendations or course corrections, commented on what would be a more appropriate way of handling the situation in the future. The Prime Minister has availed himself of that report, has committed to following every single word of that report, whether it is stated as a capital “R” recommendation, or whether it is implied through the referencing inside the report. Every single word of that report has been read and is being followed by the Prime Minister. That is ethical leadership. That is being responsible to the offices of Parliament. That is respecting the House. It is the party opposite that is having trouble dealing with the report. Members think it did not go far enough. That is their problem, and it is partisan issue. It is not a point of principle.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate and go to the hon. parliamentary secretary to the minister of innovation, I will let him know that there are only about six minutes or so left in the time for his remarks. He will have the remaining portion of his time when the House next gets back to debate on this question.

We will get started, and I will give him the usual signal when we are ready to interrupt for statements by members.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

[Translation]

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak to this motion, a

dilatory motion moved in bad faith for the purpose of wasting the House of Commons' time. The motion deals with a matter that has already been addressed, as my colleague from Spadina—Fort York just explained in great detail. We dutifully heeded the Ethics Commissioner's advice according to a process that works very well in Parliament.

This is somewhat ironic because today is a historic day. Our Prime Minister gave a speech to the French National Assembly. It is the first time that a Canadian prime minister has addressed the French National Assembly. That is very important. Our Prime Minister spoke mainly about our values, progressive trade, immigration, environmental protection, gender equality, and the rule of law, which is very important to me as a lawyer. He also spoke about democracy, equality, and freedom.

What can we do about the cynicism in today's opposition motion? There is such a clear difference between our government's approach and that of Mr. Harper's Conservatives, one which remains under the current leadership. I would be curious to know if this would have changed under the leadership of my colleague from Beauce.

Today is a prime example of why I ran in the last election. I wanted to combat this cynicism. When I was in university, I felt that Mr. Harper's government was always very cynical and did not respect the rules of Parliament or the Canadian people. I ran for office to change the direction of the government and that is exactly what we have done.

We want to help Canadians find housing and employment and we want to invest in innovation, infrastructure, and in Canadians. We sincerely believe that the government has the power to change things and improve life for Canadians.

• (1355)

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I notice that the Liberals are not speaking about the motion that I introduced earlier today. They want to keep speaking, and it would seem that they perhaps want to talk about the budget. We would be happy on this side of the House to close off debate on the current motion and vote on it. That is what we do in the House of Commons. We debate legislation, debate motions, and then we vote on them. Therefore, we are absolutely willing to end the debate and have a vote on this motion. If the member wants to talk about the budget, why do we not bring the bill before the House so we can all debate it?

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That notwithstanding any Standing Orders or usual practices of the House, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion currently under debate to concur in the report of the Ethics Commissioner entitled “The Trudeau Report”, tabled on Monday, January 29, 2018, be deemed put, recorded divisions be deemed requested and deferred to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment today, and that the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. opposition House leader have unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Statements by Members

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: At this point, we will interrupt and start with statements by members. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the minister of innovation will have 16 and a half minutes remaining in his time when the House next gets back to debate on the question, and, of course, the usual 10 minutes for questions and comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

NETFLIX

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, like our National Assembly, Quebec's cultural community, and our broadcasters, the European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs believes that Netflix should do its fair share. According to the commissioner, the status quo is unacceptable. Sadly, with our Minister of Finance more concerned with Bay Street and our Minister of Canadian Heritage more concerned with *Gangnam Style*, we are stuck with the status quo.

Quebec decided to charge QST on Netflix subscriptions. That is fair, right, and normal. However, this government is digging in its heels and keeps spouting nonsense about new taxes that do not even exist. Abiding by our way of doing things and paying taxes like everyone else is the very least we can expect from a company that wants to do business here.

The status quo is unacceptable. We have been saying that for months. Europe understands. It is high time that Ottawa understand this too. Enough with this unfair and unjustifiable advantage.

* * *

[*English*]

MURIEL OLIPHANT

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to a constituent and friend, Muriel Oliphant. Sadly, Muriel passed away suddenly on Saturday, April 7. I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the member for Don Valley West, who has lost his biggest supporter, his mother.

The member's eulogy for his mother entitled "A Reflection of a Life Well Lived and Well Loved" was apropos. Muriel was proud of all her children: Leslie, Barbara, Mary, and Rob.

Muriel was the very definition of a good neighbour. She worked countless volunteer hours for a variety of causes, such as the Canadian Cancer Society, Christmas Cheer, and the Central United Church. Muriel was also an incredible volunteer and supporter of the Liberal Party of Canada, and I assure members that her legacy will long be remembered.

Sault Ste. Marie, and Canada, is a better place because of Muriel Oliphant. She now joins Len in heaven.

This House knows how important our family is to all of us. Please join me in celebrating this remarkable woman.

● (1400)

MOUNT EVEREST CLIMB

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a very determined young lady from Edson, Alberta, Ciera Knight, a 24-year-old.

On November 11, 2011, two weeks before she was to compete in a tae kwon do competition and hopefully for a position on Canada's Olympic team, tragedy struck: a car accident, a broken back, and severe neck injuries. Ciera would never compete again. However, determined, she rebuilt her strength, opened up her own tae kwon do training facility, and taught her skills to others. She became a personal fitness trainer and a role model in her community.

In June 2016, she did a preliminary climb to the base camp on Mount Everest. Today she is back. She is at 16,108 feet above sea level. Ciera is determined to climb the highest mountain in the world. One more day to base camp, then more training, conditioning, and acclimatizing. Between May 20 and 26, Ciera is determined to climb to the top of the world.

From all of us here in Canada, we say "go for it". She is what women's empowerment is all about.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.):

[*Member spoke in Punjabi*]

[*English*]

Vaisakhi was celebrated on the Hill yesterday. On Vaisakhi, we celebrate the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The Khalsa is symbolized by the khanda, the symbol of the Sikh faith, and features two kirpans crossing one another, representing the concepts of Miri and Piri. These concepts emphasize a Sikh's commitment to both a spiritual life and a political life and an obligation to confront injustice and inequality. Sikh values of seva, equality, social justice, and making the world a better place are the embodiment of Canadian values as well.

On behalf of residents in Brampton South, I would like to wish members a happy Vaisakhi.

* * *

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is National Volunteer Week, and I want to take the time to thank the 13 million Canadians who generously donate their time to help their communities. In Canada, volunteer work represents the equivalent of more than one million full-time jobs, for a contribution valued at \$56 billion, or 2.6% of GDP. Despite all the numbers, we strongly believe that volunteering brings priceless value to our communities.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]*

In many rural communities across Canada, essential services ranging from health to culture and even education depend on volunteers to survive. Let us not forget that without these volunteers, some villages would wither away, doomed to disappear completely.

However, we also volunteer in order to bring our neighbours together and celebrate. For example, the village of Dupuy in Abitibi West, where I live, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, thanks to the dedication and hard work of many volunteers, made up of virtually the entire local population. Since this week is National Volunteer Week, I want to take a moment to honour these volunteers and thank them for their efforts. Volunteers are amazing.

* * *

*[English]***TRIUMF PARTICLE ACCELERATOR**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to celebrate the 50th anniversary of TRIUMF, Canada's particle accelerator centre, a hub for discovery and innovation. Founded in 1968 as the regional tri-university meson facility, TRIUMF is now a multidisciplinary, nationwide partnership of 20 universities.

Powered by top talent and advanced accelerator infrastructure, including the world's largest cyclotron and a new superconducting linear accelerator, TRIUMF is driving the leading edge in science, innovation, and technology.

As a perfect example of the value of the pure science our government embraces, TRIUMF is enhancing the lives of Canadians as it continues to push the frontiers in research to advance science, medicine, and business. By asking the big questions about our universe and exploring tiny particles, TRIUMF boosts the knowledge economy. By providing inspiration and training to the next generations of young scientists and innovators, TRIUMF ensures that Canada will continue to lead for the next 50 years—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):

[Member spoke in Punjabi]

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my best wishes to everyone in Canada and abroad celebrating Vaisakhi. Tomorrow I am hosting a Vaisakhi celebration in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building at 5 p.m. I hope all members can join me.

Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike will participate in vibrant parades and celebrations. I will be attending a Vaisakhi parade this weekend in Vancouver and a Khalsa Day parade in Toronto next weekend.

I am grateful that there will be so many people joining in on the celebrations tomorrow evening.

This is also a perfect day to honour the significant contributions Sikhs have made to our great country since Confederation. I wish everyone a safe and joyful holiday. Happy Vaisakhi.

* * *

● (1405)

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK IN WHITBY

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to offer condolences to the Whitby fire department as they lay to rest today Chief Fire Protection Officer Nick Webb, who died in the line of duty.

As we celebrate National Volunteer Week, I want to highlight some awesome civic spirit and dedication in Whitby. In particular, I recognize Jason and Brenda Atkins, of 360insights, who raised \$46,000 for a stem facility in Haiti; James Potvin, nine years old, who rode his bike from Whitby to Ottawa last year and will ride to Coney Island this year to raise money for Grandview Children's Hospital; Isaac Wanzama of Geekspeak Commerce, who hosted a 36-hour hack-a-thon to build an app to fight climate change; and Wounded Warriors and their In This Together campaign to raise awareness of mental health for veterans and first responders.

Whitby Fire and local businesses have raised money for children to get surgery. Neighbours gather for movies in the park to feed the needy in Durham.

I invite all my colleagues to join me in congratulating the people of Whitby for their incredible spirit of community and generosity.

* * *

*[Translation]***JEAN-YVES PHANEUF AND MARK CHAPLIN**

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me immense pleasure to pay tribute to Jean-Yves Phaneuf and Mark Chaplin, who received the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers from the Governor General of Canada this morning for their outstanding volunteer contributions to my riding of Shefford.

Mr. Phaneuf has dedicated more than 40 years of his life to promoting youth soccer. He is the founder of the Cosmos de Granby soccer club and the driving force behind Canada's biggest soccer tournament. He has been inducted into the Quebec Soccer Hall of Fame.

Mr. Chaplin has been volunteering with the Navy League of Canada since 2009, where he fosters and maintains the well-being of the cadet corps of the municipality of Valcourt. He was honoured for his tireless dedication to helping youth in our region.

Statements by Members

Mr. Phaneuf and Mr. Chaplin, who are here in Ottawa this afternoon, fully deserve these commendations for their contributions to helping youth in our community. I want to extend my warmest congratulations to them and thank them for their great generosity.

* * *

[English]

VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 9, Canadians marked the 101st anniversary of Vimy Ridge. Vimy Ridge Day marks one of the most important events in Canadian history. It commemorates the coming together of all four First World War corps for the first time to accomplish what no other allied army was able to do.

The Germans had heavily fortified the seven-kilometre ridge. Canadian soldiers were posted along what was known as the crater line, only metres apart from the German positions and one of the most dangerous positions on the front. At 5:30 a.m. on the morning of April 9, 1917, the Canadians pressed forward. It cost 10,000 Canadian lives to take the ridge. Another 11,000 were wounded.

For over a century, and without pause, the men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces have not wavered in their resolve to defend our country, our values, and our way of life.

Lest we forget.

* * *

CHARTERED PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS OF CANADA

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a proud fellow chartered professional accountant, I am delighted to highlight an important milestone for Canada's accounting profession.

[Translation]

On April 1, the accounting profession celebrated its fifth anniversary of operations.

[English]

Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada, CPA Canada, is one of the largest national accounting bodies in the world, with over 210,000 members at home and abroad.

● (1410)

[Translation]

CPA Canada's mission is to act in the public interest and contribute to economic and social development.

[English]

Members of the CPA profession work with the government on vital issues, such as tax policy, financial literacy, climate change, labour mobility, and international trade.

[Translation]

I invite all parliamentarians to join me in commending them for their efforts and wishing CPA Canada a happy anniversary.

[English]

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 36 years ago today, Queen Elizabeth II signed into law the Constitution Act, 1982, which contains the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter is a statement of Canada's principles, including fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, and language rights, and it provides a framework to assert these cherished principles. The body of jurisprudence that has developed under the charter has breathed life into the document.

[Translation]

We are blessed to live in one of the best countries in the world. However, we should never take that blessing for granted and we must continue to work for liberty, justice, and equality for all our citizens.

[English]

I invite all of us here in Parliament, and indeed all Canadians, to reflect on the principles expressed 36 years ago in the charter and the responsibility we have to bequeath to the generations of Canadians to follow an even more free, fair, and democratic Canada.

* * *

HUMBOLDT BRANCOS BUS CRASH

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our nation grieves the tragic accident involving the Humboldt Broncos. While this is a national tragedy, it has hit particularly close to home for my community of St. Albert. Four of the young men who lost their lives played for the St. Albert Raiders hockey team: Conner Lukan, Jaxon Joseph, Logan Hunter, and Stephen Wack. Each of these young men touched the lives of so many people in our community.

In the wake of this tragedy, the people of St. Albert have come together to show their love and support for all of those who have been impacted by this tragedy. Conner, Jaxon, Logan, and Stephen's positive contributions will always be remembered.

* * *

[Translation]

FADI ZIADEH

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during a ceremony at Rideau Hall on January 29, the Right Honourable Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada, received the letters of credence of the head of the Lebanon mission, His Excellency Fadi Ziadeh, ambassador of the Republic of Lebanon in Canada.

On behalf of my colleagues in the House, I want to wish Mr. Ziadeh the best of luck in his mandate. He was the consul general of Lebanon in Montreal for six years, where he already left his mark by modernizing consular services for the Lebanese community.

Oral Questions

I sincerely hope that our new ambassador will help our relations with Lebanon to continue to progress. We are determined to develop our bilateral, economic, cultural, and political ties and work together in international forums in which we share common interests.

Long live Canada. Love live Lebanon.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is way behind on meeting its objectives with respect to protecting marine environments. The Liberal government committed to protecting at least 10% of marine environments by 2020. Unfortunately, the government is taking shortcuts by creating marine refuges. This invention, which has no legal basis, does not even comply with internationally recognized criteria.

This is why I tabled Motion No. 169, to create a marine protected area in the St. Lawrence Estuary. This motion builds on a motion I moved in 2014 to protect the belugas and the fragile ecosystem in the St. Lawrence. This government must take immediate action and listen to the public and to organizations like the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the David Suzuki Foundation. I urge the public to join me in calling for the creation of marine protected areas to preserve our biodiversity.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

HUMBOLDT BRONCOS BUS CRASH

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Friday, April 6 marked a very dark day for the community of Humboldt, the province of Saskatchewan, and all of Canada.

While there are no words to capture the devastation and heartbreak that too many families are experiencing right now, there is hope. A debt of gratitude is owed to our emergency medical services personnel, doctors, nurses, crisis workers, and chaplains, who performed their duties with dedication and professionalism under the most difficult of circumstances.

Saskatchewanians are strong and resilient, but this tragedy has reminded us that we need one another. At times like this, we draw on our loved ones, friends, and neighbours for strength. The outpouring of support from Canada and around the world, and from members on both sides of this place, also reminds us of what is truly important in life: faith, love, family, and community.

We love you, Humboldt, and our thoughts and prayers remain with you and all those touched by this tragedy.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

[Translation]

G7 YOUTH DELEGATES

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, Canada has the privilege to welcome youth delegates to

Ottawa from the G7 member countries; the European Union; Charlevoix, the G7 host city; and several indigenous communities.

[English]

We welcome these 36 young leaders as they come together to find youth-led solutions to gender equality, the future of work in a changing economy, and climate change and the environment.

This gathering would not be possible without the work of the Young Diplomats of Canada, most notably co-chairs Sabrina Grover and Max Seunik and the entire YDC team.

As the first government to recognize the Y7 as a formal engagement group, setting a benchmark for the G7, we look forward to accepting the official communique of the Y7 this Wednesday. I am confident that the same can be said of the G7 leaders this coming June.

[Translation]

As our Prime Minister said, young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the leaders of today. These young leaders are proof of that.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline was announced with a promise of a \$7.4 billion investment in our economy and the creation of 37,000 Canadian jobs. It was great news for an industry that was already suffering from the loss of previously announced projects, such as energy east.

Now, just months after this approval, we find ourselves in a crisis and the future of this project in serious danger. Was the Prime Minister really serious when he said he wanted to phase out the oil sands from the Canadian economy?

• (1420)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada approved the pipeline because of the jobs that it will create, because of the better price we will get for our natural resources in export markets, and because of the importance not only for western Canadians but for the whole country to learn that the future of the energy industry in Canada is vital to our economic growth. The Prime Minister has reiterated that objective as recently as two days ago.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, words without action are simply words, and the reality is that this government has a record of making great announcements but an appalling record of actually implementing the things it is announcing.

Oral Questions

We have the third-largest oil reserves in the world, and our economy depends upon the success of this industry. The uncertainty over Trans Mountain is costing us \$40 million a day, and billions of dollars more are fleeing our country. Why is the Prime Minister shortchanging Canadians through his failure to deliver?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the uncertainty that has been surrounding the project, an uncertainty that is due in large part to the actions and the threat of actions by the Government of British Columbia, which is why the Prime Minister said very clearly to all Canadians on Sunday that he has asked the Minister of Finance to engage in financial discussions with Kinder Morgan and others while the government looks at all legislative options.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister speaks of one province, but this is not a crisis that is caused by one province or another; it is a crisis that is caused simply by the lack of leadership and the inability of the government to actually get the job done. We have seen this before, and as long as the government fails to step up, we are going to see it again.

Eighty billion dollars in investment has left the energy sector, as well as 100,000 well-paying Canadian jobs. These results are simply unacceptable. When will the Prime Minister stop failing the Canadian families who are relying on these projects?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 10 years of the Harper government, they failed—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, I know why they would be sensitive. It is because not one kilometre of pipeline was built so that we could access global markets. Ninety-nine per cent of the exports of oil and gas go to one country, the United States. I think all members of the House would agree that this is not in Canada's interest.

The Prime Minister could not be clearer. This project is good for Canada, and it will be built.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians of good faith want this project to work. This is a \$7.5-billion project that, it is important to note, has the support of over 40 first nations communities. First nations that will be directly affected by this project want it to happen. Canadians want it. The problem is that the Prime Minister of Canada does not believe in Canadian oil and does not like it. Over a year ago, he said “it's time to phase them out”, to cut back on Canadian oil and get rid of it.

With such a bad salesperson, is it any wonder the project is stalled?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know how important this project is. The Trans Mountain expansion is in the national interest. That is why we support it, and that is why it will get built. We believe Canada's economic growth goes hand in hand with important environmental responsibilities. Alberta's natural resources are important to Canada. British Columbia has a role to play and a responsibility. The federal government will ensure that this bill goes through.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is so invested in this project that the Prime Minister said that we need to gradually phase out Canadian oil. It was the Prime Minister of Canada himself who said that. It makes no sense.

We all know that we are in this mess because of British Columbia, the NDP government, and the Greens, but we have known that for 10 months now.

What did the Prime Minister do to ensure that this project would go through today?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and this government are taking the necessary steps to ensure that this project is built. We acknowledge our responsibilities. The Prime Minister has always said it was important to ensure that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. That is what we are doing.

Our Prime Minister initiated a dialogue with Canada's indigenous peoples, something Mr. Harper's Conservatives never did. We implemented a strategy for the environment, something Mr. Harper's Conservatives never did. We are building pipelines, something the Conservatives never did.

● (1425)

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the meeting on Sunday, the Prime Minister said he was determined to impose a solution on British Columbia and Alberta to resolve the Trans Mountain pipeline dispute. The federal government should be trying to calm the waters, not adding fuel to the fire.

The Government of Quebec reminded Ottawa that it is also indisputable that governments must work together when analyzing projects that affect more than one Canadian jurisdiction.

The government cannot have it both ways. Either it works with the provinces, or it imposes its will on the provinces. Which is it going to be?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the government side, we take our responsibilities very seriously. We know that the decision on this pipeline, which will run through two provinces, is a federal responsibility. This is recognized not only in the Constitution, but also by the Supreme Court. The federal jurisdiction must be upheld. We are currently in talks with the two provinces. The Prime Minister spoke with the two provincial premiers last Sunday. We are working on a solution, and that is the most constructive approach.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, British Columbians have legitimate concerns about the Trans Mountain pipeline project, and they recently elected a government that takes these concerns seriously. In fact, they gave their newly elected government a clear mandate on this issue.

The B.C. government is just doing what it was elected to do. Standing up and following through on an election promise is what governments are supposed to do. The Liberals could stand to learn a lesson from this.

Oral Questions

How can the government continue to ignore both its own election promises and the real concerns of British Columbians?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Alberta was elected on a mandate to have the pipeline built. The Premier of British Columbia was elected on a mandate to use every tool kit to see that the project would not be built. The Government of Canada, the only government that speaks for all Canadians, will make sure the project is built.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indigenous opposition to Kinder Morgan's pipeline expansion is strong, it is growing, and several first nations have already taken the government to court for having violated its constitutional duty to consult. It is a sad day when, despite lofty rhetoric, the government also is ignoring its constitutional obligations.

The government wants to talk about the rule of law. How about respecting section 35 of the Constitution? How about respecting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' free, prior, and informed consent? Whatever happened to that most important relationship with indigenous peoples?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Federal Court of Appeal in the northern gateway case quashed the approval, not because Enbridge did not consult sufficiently, not because the National Energy Board did not consult sufficiently, but because the Harper government did not. We were left with a decision whether to use the same process that had failed the court test.

We decided there had to be much greater consultation. Now we know that 43 indigenous communities benefit from this, 33 of them in British Columbia. We have co-developed with indigenous communities. Monitoring this pipeline—

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

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, most of those so-called agreements are letters of understanding, MOUs. We can hardly call them agreements.

[*Translation*]

A letter of understanding does not mean consent for the project. We have had enough of these false characterizations at the expense of indigenous communities. The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, which represents over half of all first nations in the province, remains resolutely opposed to the project.

When will this government finally get serious about its most important relationship, the relationship with indigenous peoples?

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know these energy projects are divisive by their very nature. We know provincial governments do not agree. We have seen all kinds of evidence of that. We know that even within the New Democratic Party, premiers do not agree. We know that within indigenous communities also. There are those who are on the side of developing the project and those who are not.

Ultimately, a decision has to be taken with respect to our constitutional obligations that is mindful of Canada's interest.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has failed the energy sector, and it is not just with respect to Trans Mountain. The climate that he has created in Canada has become so toxic for investment that investment and jobs are leaving in droves. The energy sector is speaking with its wallet. In fact, we have not seen such a decline in energy investment in over 70 years.

Here is my question for the Minister of Natural Resources. Does he even know how many billions of dollars have left the country over the last two years under his watch?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the people of Alberta have suffered as a result of the low commodity prices. We know some 120,000 were jobs lost, but thankfully at least half of them have returned. We know we have approved the Enbridge Line 3 replacement. We have approved the Trans Mountain expansion. We are in favour of the KXL pipeline. We have met with energy workers. We have met with CEOs of the energy industry. They realize this government stands with energy workers.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no answer from the minister.

Let me tell him that \$80 billion have left in the last two years under the failed policies of the minister and the Prime Minister. Those numbers do not lie. Things like the carbon tax, extra red tape for investors, and erroneous failed policies are why investors are saying they are leaving Canada.

How many more billions of dollars have to leave the country before the Liberals reverse their terrible anti-energy policy?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the natural resources sector is a very important part of the Canadian economy. We are happy to report that the Canadian economy is doing very well. It is leading the G7. We have created more than 600,000 jobs with the help of Canadians, small business people, full-time jobs. We know Alberta is leading the recovery of the nation.

Why does the opposition not celebrate the accomplishment of Albertans?

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's failure to take leadership and the total abdication of his responsibility has shaken investor confidence in Canada. His failure puts at risk billions of dollars in investment and billions of dollars in future government revenue for important programs like health care.

Oral Questions

This crisis is about more than even the pipeline itself. It is about the confidence job-creating businesses have in Canada.

Could the government tell the House how many jobs have been lost in this industry since 2015?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased to report that jobs are being added to this industry in 2018. As the members opposite I am sure know, business confidence in Canada grew, was enhanced, in 2017. Many nations are looking to Canada, looking at the recipe for economic growth and performance, understanding that in this country energy policy and economic policy go hand in hand, something that completely escaped the understanding of the Conservative government that came before.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the shocking answer is 110,000 jobs. To make matters worse, the Prime Minister is imposing a carbon tax and new regulations that penalize Canadian oil exports. Industry associations, oil and gas companies, and CEOs of major Canadian banks and investment management portfolios warn that we are in a serious crisis.

When will the government finally listen to the experts, but, more importantly, to Canadian workers who are demanding the Prime Minister lay out a plan to ensure this pipeline gets built?

• (1435)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did lay out a plan. It is too bad that the Leader of the Opposition did not hang around long enough to hear it before he took to the airwaves, before the Premier of Alberta spoke and before the Prime Minister of Canada spoke. He did not have to hear the Prime Minister's plan. Somehow he intuited what it might be.

It might have been more respectful for the Leader of the Opposition to do a little listening before he did a little talking.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said he wants to phase out the oil sands. Well, he is doing it.

By introducing Bill C-69 and the carbon tax, the Prime Minister is driving investors out of the country. Petronas, Shell, and ConocoPhillips have all left. Gateway and energy east have been cancelled and the Trans Mountain pipeline is on life support.

The government claims to make evidence-based decisions. When will it accept the evidence that the resources approach is failing, and reverse these job-killing policies?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we approved the TMX. We approved Enbridge Line 3. The previous Conservative government ruined the chances of northern gateway by insufficiently consulting with indigenous peoples. Jobs were lost in the energy sector during its 10 failed years in government.

We actually have to thank the Conservatives, because we are learning from their mistakes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Well, the mistakes continue, Mr. Speaker.

Today, speaking in France, the Prime Minister reiterated his desire to see the Alberta energy sector done away with, phased out. He is doing a very good job already.

Under the Prime Minister, major projects that would see our oil and gas get to new world markets have been cancelled. Pacific NorthWest, gateway, and energy east pipelines have all died.

Our fight to keep Trans Mountain alive is so essential because the Prime Minister has killed all of the other options.

Does the minister support the Prime Minister's plan to phase out the Alberta oil and gas sector?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of visiting Fort McMurray with the Prime Minister when we talked to energy workers. We talked about how much progress was being made.

It would be good for members of the opposition to every once in a while talk about the progress that is being made in Alberta on sustainably developing our resource on GHG emission and reductions as a result of the innovation and entrepreneurship.

We on this side of the House place an awful lot of stock in the innovation and entrepreneurship of business leadership in Alberta. We wish members opposite shared our optimism.

* * *

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2017, the mass arrival of asylum seekers prompted a crisis in Quebec and Manitoba. This crisis did not come as a surprise, I should point out.

Everyone is calling on the government to get a plan. A year later, the same thing is happening again. Where is the plan? It does not exist or it is well hidden, because we have not seen anything. The messages on Twitter saying that they are welcome are not enough. We need action.

When will the government step up, present a plan, and respond to Quebec's demands?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada remains open and welcoming to people who need protection. However, our government is determined to maintain regular immigration.

[*English*]

We work with the provinces through the intergovernmental task force on irregular migration. As part of budget 2018, we are investing \$173 million for border security operations, as well as more investments for faster processing of refugee claims. We have fast-tracked work permits for asylum claimants so they can put less pressure on provincial services. We will continue to do the good work we are doing.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec is asking for help. Since the beginning of the year, the number of irregular migrants has tripled. Welcome centres in Quebec are at 71% capacity. The federal government is responsible for our borders, but Quebec is footing the bill.

Groups in our ridings are already overwhelmed. Ottawa needs to do its part. It must lower processing times for files. Files currently take two years to be processed, when they should be processed in 60 days.

Will the Liberal government listen to Quebec's heartfelt appeal?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have made the necessary investments. For example, last summer, Quebec approached us through the intergovernmental task force on irregular migration and said we should help them with faster processing of work permits for asylum seekers. We have done that. We have slashed that timeline from three months to three weeks, and we have issued over 12,000 work permits for asylum seekers in Quebec.

In addition to that, as part of budget 2018, we are delivering an additional \$112 million for more settlement and integration services for newcomers in Quebec.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 22, the foreign affairs minister apologized to her Indian counterpart for Canada's honest mistake in inviting Jaspal Atwal to the Prime Minister's event. Now Mr. Atwal says the Liberal MP for Surrey Centre warned him he would need security clearance before he could attend.

Was the honest mistake the invitation itself, or the department's failure to vet the invitation for security and protocol concerns?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the national security adviser testified before the public safety committee. I understand that as of today, arrangements are being made for a specific appointment for the Leader of the Opposition to be briefed and to receive the classified briefing that would be appropriate. It has taken over three weeks, but it is happening and it is a good thing.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is right. The national security adviser testified, after two months of asking, and after all-night votes in this chamber. The government was blocking that, only to have the national security adviser confirm that the suggestion by the government that there was an Indian conspiracy was not true. Yesterday, the government refused to be transparent and release a full list of the Prime Minister's itinerary, events, and guests in India.

We know that one former convicted terrorist made his way onto that invitation list. Is the government's unwillingness to release the full list a sign that there are more?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a headline last week characterized the opposition's position in this matter rather well. The headline said, "Conservatives duped by false story". In fact, they need to have the classified briefing to fully understand the facts and the context. That briefing was offered three weeks ago. The opposition has now accepted the briefing. It is being scheduled in the next short while, and that is a good thing to make sure they are not duped anymore.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we can discuss this further to determine who was duped, because yesterday we heard the testimony of the national security adviser, Daniel Jean. We hoped that his remarks would shed light on the Atwal affair, but they did not. The Prime Minister is complicating the situation by refusing to answer questions. Perhaps I will be more successful today if I ask a very simple question.

Who, in the Prime Minister's Office, authorized Daniel Jean to brief the media?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and Mr. Jean have been completely in sync with each other in what they have said publicly about this matter. The only contradiction, if we check the record in the House and outside the House, is in fact coming from the opposition. The solution for that is the classified briefing that was offered three weeks ago to the Leader of the Opposition. That offer has now been accepted, the briefing is being scheduled, and that is a good thing.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that the national security adviser confirmed yesterday that India was not part of a conspiracy to undermine Canada.

However, the Prime Minister unequivocally stated the opposite. Given that the national security adviser is contradicting the Prime Minister, and given that it is clear that the Prime Minister was wrong to make such accusations, will the Prime Minister finally apologize to the Government of India for making up the conspiracy theory?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was members of the opposition who made that accusation in the House of Commons time and time again, and they were wrong.

*Oral Questions***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, due to a lack of funding, the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre has had to discontinue its hotline after decades of service. Year in, year out, the hotline has helped hundreds of women in Victoria. Across the country, rape crisis centres face the same urgent problem, and with the surge of victims coming forward after the #MeToo movement, the situation just gets worse.

If the Prime Minister is truly concerned with the well-being of women and sexual assault victims, why does the budget not provide stable, predictable, operating funding to rape crisis centres?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his commitment to gender equality. I would point out that budget 2018 built on our investments to advance gender equality in Canada. Funding for women's organizations doubled. Funding for rape crisis centres doubled. That does not include the addition of the first gender-based violence strategy for prevention in the history of this country. I would ask that the member from the party opposite please add that to the report card, which has so unkindly missed this important investment in Canadian women.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister brags about his feminist budget, but it still leaves many women behind. It does nothing to address the specific challenges faced by indigenous and racialized women. We know they face higher rates of violence, poverty, housing insecurity, and the list goes on. While the government claims to care about them, there is no action to prove it.

When will the Prime Minister stop spinning us and the world on his faux feminism and actually invest in improving women's lives?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, budget 2018 was the first federal budget in the history of Confederation to have an intersectional gendered lens applied to all new spending, because we believe that when we invest in women, we improve the economy for the middle class and those working hard to join it.

We have invested in women's organizations. We have invested in indigenous communities in historic ways, and there is more work remaining. We are listening to women's leaders across the country, who are applauding our efforts for advancing gender equality. We are also leading the G7 in this work, through our presidency this year.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no relationship is more important to this government than its relationship with indigenous peoples. Far beyond my province of British Columbia, the Trans Mountain expansion project stands to create jobs, grow Canada's economy, and respect environmental commitments. Benefits include over \$300 million in mutual beneficial agreements signed with 43 first nations. Many first nations recognize this project as a source of prosperity and opportunity.

Can the minister responsible inform this House of our approach to engage meaningfully with indigenous peoples on this crucial resource development project?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his support of this important project.

The review of the TMX project was the most exhaustive in the history of pipelines in Canada. There were 118 indigenous groups who had their voices heard, and we co-developed with first nations a historic indigenous advisory and monitoring committee to ensure that the project moves forward in the safest and most sustainable way possible.

Environmental protection, economic growth, and a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples are the pillars of this government's approach to resource development.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister recently sent the Liberal MP for Mississauga—Erin Mills to bring greetings on his behalf at an event organized by the anti-Israel Palestine House. This event starred a Palestinian activist who supports suicide bombings and met with President Assad of Syria in 2017. The activist said, "I'm proud of my meeting with President Assad...President Assad is not a murderer or a butcher." This was after Assad had used illegal chemical weapons against innocent civilians.

Why would the Prime Minister send greetings to an event starring a friend of Assad?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been clear in its position of condemnation against the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons and its indiscriminate violence against its own citizens. We have been clear that it must end and that they must engage in meaningful negotiation.

We have been equally clear on our position that Canada is a steadfast ally and friend of Israel and of the Palestinian people. We are committed to a just, lasting, and durable peace in the Middle East, including the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel.

● (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's lack of ethics and his inconsistency have already cost us too much, but it gets worse. Things have gone way too far. We have now learned that the Prime Minister and his team are very accommodating in dealing with Assad regime supporters, and Canadians need an explanation for this new gaffe.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister tell us why he sent greetings to an event where the guest of honour is a friend of Assad?

Mr. Matt DeCourcy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have been clear in our condemnation of the use of chemical weapons against the people of eastern Ghouta. We supported the decision of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to take measures to weaken the Assad regime's ability to launch chemical attacks against its own people. We condemn the Assad regime and its supporters, Russia and Iran, for these repeated human rights violations and the deliberate targeting of civilians.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a blatant, inexcusable endorsement of a notorious apologist for the brutal terror sponsoring, human rights abusing President of Syria, words of praise not offered by a merely misguided member of Parliament pandering for votes with an organization with a history of support for extremism and terror, but on a behalf of the Prime Minister of Canada.

Will the Prime Minister distance himself from this outrageous tribute in his name?

Mr. Matt DeCourcy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the chance to stand twice now and I will do it a third time to reiterate this government's clear position of condemnation against the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime. We have been clear that the Assad regime must end its indiscriminate killing of its own citizens and engage in meaningful negotiation to achieve a just and lasting peace in Syria. We have been clear from the very beginning, and we will continue to condemn the use of chemical weapons and the indiscriminate killing of citizens done by the Assad regime.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills may be willing to stand with an extremist supporter she addresses as “brother Amin”. She may be willing to praise a man who denies President Assad is a murderer and a butcher in return for support in the next federal election.

Will the Prime Minister disassociate himself from this misguided tribute to extremism made by the member in the Prime Minister's name?

Mr. Matt DeCourcy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will say one final time that Canada's position is strong and clear. We condemn the use of chemical weapons by the murderous Assad regime. The Assad regime must end the indiscriminate violence against its own people and it must engage in meaningful negotiations.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP presented its report card on women in budget 2018. It shows that the government has essentially failed when it comes to the most important issues for women. Nothing has been done to make it easier for women to access public transportation, which they use more than men and which is severely lacking in rural

regions. Nothing has been done to ensure pay equity or to implement a universal, affordable child care program.

Will the government commit to immediately providing the funding necessary to achieve gender equality?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we invest in women, we grow the economy for everyone.

[English]

This philosophy is at the heart of our investments in communities across the country.

I have to add that my hon. colleague is wrong. We are investing in lifting hundreds of thousands of Canadian kids out of poverty. We are investing historic amounts in infrastructure, including public transit. We have committed to introducing pay equity legislation this fall, with additional funds focused on pay transparency. We also have invested in a historic strategy to advance and prevent gender-based violence, while doubling funding for women's organizations, because when we invest in women, we grow the economy for everyone.

• (1455)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, on Equality Day, I gave Liberals a failing grade in our NDP report card on women's equality in budget 2018. While the Prime Minister claims he is a feminist, he has failed to act on the most pressing challenges facing women in Canada. The budget provides zero dollars for pay equity, no money for universal affordable child care, and does not reform EI requirements that discriminate against women.

When will the Prime Minister put his money where his mouth is and stop making women wait?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's commitment to gender equality, but I have to point out the inaccuracies and omissions in the NDP report card. The women's groups across the country, and indeed around the world, are applauding our Prime Minister and our government's efforts to advance gender equality. The first budget to have an intersectional gender lens applied to it was budget 2018, but it will not be the last. We will be legislating this process so that future governments can see this work. Pay equity is going to be introduced in this House in the fall, and I am sure it will have her support.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because the Liberals are so soft on border security, Quebec's temporary shelters are stretched to the limit, and a further wave of illegal migrants is expected this summer. Will Quebec have to open the Olympic stadium?

Oral Questions

The Liberals are not taking the situation seriously. The Prime Minister thinks he can fix everything with a selfie and some sweet talk, but it does not work that way.

When will the Prime Minister and the Liberals face up to their responsibilities and tackle a problem of their own creation by supporting the Quebec government?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our country is an open and welcoming place for people seeking protection. However, our government is committed to ensuring an orderly immigration process.

[English]

We work very closely with Quebec, and collaborate closely on issues affecting Quebec and other provinces through the inter-governmental task force on irregular migration. We have listened carefully to concerns raised by Quebec. Part of budget 2018 contains a \$173-million investment in faster processing of asylum claims, as well as border security operations. We will continue to work closely with Quebec to address any—

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his Liberals are asleep at the wheel. We are talking about 300 to 400 illegal migrants entering per day through Lacolle. It is going to be a chaotic mess. Meanwhile, they are slamming the door in the Quebec government's face. Four exasperated ministers are demanding action and support.

You break it, you buy it.

The Speaker: I am sure he knows this, but I would like to remind the hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis that he must direct his comments through the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Immigration.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, reducing processing times for work permits from three months to three weeks is not doing nothing. It is doing something. Issuing 12,000 work permits for asylum seekers so that we minimize pressure on Quebec social services is doing something. Increasing settlement and integration services money by \$112 million is doing something. Increasing the Canada social transfer envelope by almost \$80 million is doing something.

We are here taking action and working with Quebec, collaborating closely. They are the party that left us with a broken immigration system.

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GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, middle-class Canadians are paying more under these Liberals. One woman told me that she lost her home because of the government. What about diabetics who are unreasonably being denied the disability tax credit? Instead of actually helping

Canadians, we see the Minister of Natural Resources buying 3,600 Facebook likes for \$5,000.

Does the Minister of Natural Resources believe that \$5,000 is better spent purchasing Facebook likes than on helping vulnerable Canadians?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the House what we have been focused on. We have been focused on the economy. In this last budget, we increased funding for regional development agencies to particularly help rural and remote communities. Does the House know what the members opposite did? They opposed that time and time again. For 21 hours, they opposed our budget measures to help Canadians. I can tell the House right now that our plan is working. It has helped to create 600,000 jobs. We have a low and historic unemployment rate. We will continue to focus on the economy and continue to focus on Canadians.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government recently launched the federal community housing initiative, a program that will protect housing affordability and provide greater stability for residents of over 55,000 federally administered community housing units across the country.

Could the minister responsible for housing tell the House how this new initiative aligns with the goals of Canada's first-ever national housing strategy?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle for her commendable work in support of community housing and all her constituents.

On November 22, we announced and launched this country's first-ever national housing strategy, which will provide \$40 billion over 10 years to get 530,000 Canadian families out of unaffordable or unacceptable housing. On April 4, we launched the federal community housing initiative, which will protect 555,000 Canadian families at risk of losing their community housing and ending up on the street. We will keep working very hard to ensure that all Canadians—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek.

Oral Questions

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers and manufacturers employ millions of Canadians and contribute billions of dollars to our economy. Due to the Liberal government's weak response to the current rail transportation crisis and the many flaws in Bill C-49, our farmers and shippers will continue to suffer. This morning I met with a manufacturer who has already lost \$40 million this year due to shipping issues.

When will the Minister of Transport stop ignoring the plight of our farmers, shippers, and manufacturers, and do his job?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government presented last fall a very balanced bill to address the issue of the transportation of grain, which is so important to our farmers, and of other commodities. I cannot believe that still today, the Harper Conservatives voted against that bill. They say they are the friends of farmers, but they voted against that bill.

I will take no lessons from a party that does not even support our farmers.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard nothing since the final report by Bob Rae, Canada's special envoy to Myanmar. He argued that Canada should take a leadership role in responding to the Rohingya crisis by leading an international effort to investigate and collect evidence of crimes against humanity, ramping up humanitarian aid, and welcoming more Rohingya refugees. We have heard nothing.

Will the government respond to these calls to action, and will there be more targeted sanctions?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the release of Mr. Rae's report and the recommendations contained within.

We have certainly remained seized by the unacceptable persecution of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people. These are clear crimes against humanity, which is why we have sanctioned a key military leader responsible for these crimes.

In addition, Canada has been one of the top donors to this crisis. Since the beginning of 2017, we have allocated nearly \$46 million of humanitarian aid.

We will be assessing the recommendations in this report and will have a reply in the coming weeks with further measures that Canada will take.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, problem solving and technical expertise are crucial if we want to develop our defence industry and combat emerging threats. Through innovation, we are developing the capabilities we need to overcome modern security challenges.

● (1505)

[English]

With our new defence policy, “Strong, Secure, Engaged”, our government announced that it would invest \$1.6 billion into Canada's innovation community over the next 20 years.

Could the minister inform the House on how our government is fulfilling its commitments to reaching out to Canada's most innovative and creative minds?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge for the important work that he does for his constituents.

Last week, I was proud to announce a \$313-million investment in the new innovation for defence excellence and security program, IDEaS, for short.

Our government believes that investing in science and innovation will help the Canadian Armed Forces remain at the cutting edge of technology. Through IDEaS, we are calling on Canada's most creative and innovative minds to help develop solutions to today's and tomorrow's defence challenges.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in Calgary, first degree murder charges involving notorious gang leader Nick Chan were thrown out of court due to delay.

A year and a half ago, 10 new judicial spots were established to deal with the backlog in Alberta's courts. A year and a half later, the Minister of Justice has managed to fill just one of these vacancies. Clearly, the minister is not doing her job.

Will she take responsibility for the release of this dangerous criminal?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take full responsibility for continuing to appoint the most meritorious candidates to the superior court benches across this country. To date, I have appointed 167 judges to the benches. We will continue to follow a thorough review process, going through the independent judicial advisory boards, to continue to apply and appoint judges in all provinces, including in the province of Alberta.

Privilege

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Raif Badawi has been in prison for six years as of today. His wife, Ensaf Haidar, has come to Ottawa to ask that the Canadian government do everything in its power to secure his release. Quebec passed a unanimous motion on this last week. To protect her husband, Ms. Haidar is calling on Canada to grant him honorary citizenship.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship take action on this humanitarian case and meet with Ms. Haidar?

[English]

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate our commitment to continuing to raise the case of Mr. Badawi at the highest level. We have done that in the past and we will continue to do so. The minister and I have been in touch with the wife of Mr. Badawi on her courageous work. We support her in her endeavour and we will not stop until this family is reunited.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will they meet with her?

The National Assembly has unanimously passed a motion in support of Raif Badawi. Canadian citizenship could be a crucial factor in his release and his safety. The Prime Minister promised to help him in 2015, but he has been completely ignoring the case since then. Out of sight, out of mind. His wife is in Ottawa today. Even after six years of imprisonment, she has never given up.

Does this government, specifically the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, believe in freedom of expression?

Do they believe in protecting Canadian families? If so, they must meet with her.

[English]

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this is an important case to the Government of Canada. We are on it. We have raised this case repeatedly and we will continue to do so.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I moved a motion for concurrence in “The Trudeau Report”. We debated that motion as well as an amendment we made to the report. We were hoping we could vote on it, but the government filibustered, which was rather interesting to watch.

There have been consultations, and I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That notwithstanding any Standing Orders or usual practices of the House, the report of the Ethics Commissioner entitled “The Trudeau Report”, tabled on Monday, January 29, 2018, be not now concurred in, but that pursuant to section 28(13) of the conflict of interest code for members of the House of Commons, it be referred back to the commissioner with instructions that he amend the same to include recommendations to close the loopholes in the code as well as the

Conflict of Interest Act that allowed the Prime Minister to withhold from the public the nature of the unacceptable gifts he received from the Aga Khan, because the public registry includes only acceptable gifts within the meaning of section 14 of the code and section 11 of the Conflict of Interest Act.

Some hon. members: No.

● (1510)

The Speaker: There appears there is no unanimous consent. I heard a lot of noes, so it would seem that way. Order.

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PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF CONTENTS OF BILL C-75

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege concerning the premature disclosure of the contents of Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments.

The Minister of Justice introduced the bill on Holy Thursday, before the Easter long weekend, on March 29, 2018, at 12:11 p.m. At 12:19 p.m., eight minutes after the minister introduced the bill, CBC posted an article entitled “Liberals propose major criminal justice changes to unclog Canada's courts”.

The article goes into detail about Bill C-75 to make a prima facie case that CBC had prior knowledge of the contents of Bill C-75 before it was introduced.

For example, the article states that “The Liberal government tabled a major bill today to reform Canada's criminal justice system”, saying it contained measures designed to close gaps in the system and speed up court proceedings, including putting an end to preliminary inquiries except for the most serious crimes that carry a life sentence. It said, “The changes also include an end to peremptory challenges in jury selection” and that another proposed reform of the bill will “impose a reverse onus on bail applications by people who have a history of [domestic] abuse, which would require them to justify their release following a charge.”

Bill C-75 is an omnibus bill containing 302 pages. While I appreciate the quality of journalism at the CBC, I do not think anyone can believe that someone could read 302 pages, analyze what was read, write an article, and then post the article on the Internet with various links in just eight minutes. If such extraordinary human capabilities exist at CBC or if unknown technology exists to make this happen, then the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs would like to hear about it.

All I am asking of you, Mr. Speaker, is to find a prima facie case on the question of privilege to allow a motion to be moved instructing the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to look into this matter.

On March 21, 1978, at page 3,975 of *Debates*, Mr. Speaker Jerome quoted a British procedure committee report of 1967, which states in part:

...the Speaker should ask himself, when he has to decide whether to grant precedence over other public business to a motion which a Member who has complained of some act or conduct as constituting a breach of privilege desires to move, should be, not—do I consider that, assuming that the facts are as stated, the act or conduct constitutes a breach of privilege, but could it reasonably be held to be a breach of privilege, or to put it shortly, has the Member an arguable point? If the Speaker feels any doubt on the question, he should, in my view, leave it to the House.

Now, whether it be superhuman capabilities or advanced unknown technology available only to the media, it is unacceptable for members of Parliament to be left behind playing catch-up while the public debate on a government bill takes place outside the House, minutes after its introduction, between a well-briefed media and a well-briefed Minister of Justice.

It has become an established practice in this House that when a bill is on notice for introduction, the House has the first right to the contents of that legislation.

On April 14, 2016, the former opposition leader and current Leader of the Opposition raised a question concerning the premature disclosure of Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying).

The Leader of the Opposition pointed out that specific and detailed information contained in Bill C-14 was reported in a newspaper article and elsewhere in the media before the bill had been introduced in the House. The member stressed the need for members to access information in order to fulfill their parliamentary responsibilities, as well as the respect required for the essential role of the House in legislative matters.

On April 19, 2016, the Speaker agreed with the Leader of the Opposition and found that there was indeed a prima facie case of privilege regarding Bill C-14. He said:

As honourable members know, one of my most important responsibilities as Speaker is to safeguard the rights and privileges of members, individually and collectively. Central to the matter before us today is the fact that, due to its pre-eminent role in the legislative process, the House cannot allow precise legislative information to be distributed to others before it has been made accessible to all members. Previous Speakers have regularly upheld not only this fundamental right, but also expectation, of the House.

The Speaker's concluding remarks on April 19, 2016, were as follows:

In this instance, the chair must conclude that the House's right of first access to legislative information was not respected. The chair appreciates the chief government whip's assertion that no one in the government was authorized to publicly release the specific details of the bill before its introduction. Still, it did happen, and these kinds of incidents cause grave concern among hon. members. I believe it is a good reason why extra care should be taken to ensure that matters that ought properly to be brought to the House first do not in any way get out in the public domain prematurely.

● (1515)

On October 4, 2010, on page 4,711 of the *House of Commons Debates*, Speaker Milliken said:

It is indisputable that it is a well-established practice and accepted convention that this House has the right of first access to the text of bills that it will consider.

There was a similar case March 19, 2001, regarding the Department of Justice briefing the media on a bill before members of Parliament. This was referenced by the Leader of the Opposition

Privilege

in his submission on the Bill C-14 case, in which he quoted Speaker Milliken as saying, at page 1,840 of the *House of Commons Debates*:

In preparing legislation, the government may wish to hold extensive consultations and such consultations may be held entirely at the government's discretion. However, with respect to material to be placed before parliament, the House must take precedence. Once a bill has been placed on notice, whether it has been presented in a different form to a different session of parliament has no bearing and the bill is considered a new matter. The convention of the confidentiality of bills on notice is necessary, not only so that members themselves may be well informed, but also because of the pre-eminent rule which the House plays and must play in the legislative affairs of the nation.

The Speaker found another case of contempt on October 15, 2001, after the Department of Justice briefed the media on the contents of a bill prior to the legislation being introduced in the House. The leak of Bill C-75 is another example of the government's disregard for Parliament and its role in the legislative process. It is important that we in the opposition call out the government for these abuses of Parliament and place before the Chair any breaches of the privileges of the House of Commons.

Speaker Milliken said:

To deny to members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

You, Mr. Speaker, said, on March 20 of this year:

...respecting members' needs for timely and accurate information remains essential. There is no question that the work of members of Parliament is made more difficult without expeditious access to legislative information. Given this reality, there is a rightful expectation that those responsible for the information should do their utmost to ensure members' access to it. Not respecting this expectation does a disservice to all. It is particularly disconcerting when the government gives priority to the media over the members of Parliament.

Given the facts presented and the clear precedents on this matter, I believe, Mr. Speaker, you should have no trouble in finding a prima facie question of privilege. In that event, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, we take the matter seriously. I will look into it and get back and report to the House at a later time.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé is rising on this question of privilege.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is correct.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Niagara Falls for his point of order today on the breach of privilege. This is of grave concern to our party and obviously to the official opposition, but all members in this House should be very concerned. This is not the first time that this has happened. This seems to be a trend coming from the Liberal government, a complete disregard and disrespect for this House.

Speaker's Ruling

As much as I have respect for the CBC, I do have concerns with the fact that eight minutes after the bill was tabled in this House, it had an article published, so there seems to be a problem here. This is an omnibus budget bill, over 300 and some odd pages, so everybody in this House should be very concerned about this trend.

I look forward to coming back to you, Mr. Speaker, with more information.

[Translation]

I look forward to your ruling on the question of privilege raised by my colleague from Niagara Falls.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé for her intervention.

[English]

I look forward to her further intervention.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ACCESS TO THE GALLERIES—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on February 28, 2018, by the member for Mégantic—L'Érable concerning access to the galleries on budget day.

[English]

I would like to thank the member for Mégantic—L'Érable for having raised this matter as well as the members for Chilliwack—Hope, Berthier—Maskinongé, and Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères for their remarks.

[Translation]

In raising the matter, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable put forward the information that on budget day, the Minister of Finance had booked all seats in the galleries, including those reserved for opposition members, therefore leaving the manager of his constituency office unable to secure either an access card from a finance department official or access to a gallery. Then, despite many seats in all galleries ultimately being unfilled on that day, he explained that his guest was again denied access by Parliamentary Protective Service, as she was without a pass from the Department of Finance. Stating that access to the galleries is the responsibility of the Speaker, and not the Department of Finance, he believed that this constituted interference by the executive branch in the administrative responsibilities of the House.

[English]

The Sergeant-at-Arms' Office provided me with details on the procedures for gallery access on budget day as well as the sequence of events in this particular case, for which I thank them. As members are aware, there is a long-standing tradition that the Minister of Finance is allocated extra seats on budget day in the south gallery and the diplomatic gallery by way of a request submitted to the Sergeant-at-Arms' Office. This year, this request was submitted and extra seats were allocated, as per the usual practice. As for the north gallery, a portion of it can also be provided to the government on budget day. That being said, seats remain available for overflow

from other galleries, and extra seating can be requested by opposition parties. On budget day, only a portion of the north gallery was reserved by the Department of Finance.

[Translation]

Thus, as the galleries were evidently not reserved entirely for guests of the Minister of Finance, the situation as described by the member for Mégantic—L'Érable was unfortunate, particularly when there was ample seating available. It is also troubling to the Chair that the information that his guest received from various Parliamentary Protective Service employees was inaccurate.

As Speaker, I have been assured that, on the morning of February 27th, the budget day, representatives from Parliamentary Protective Service and the Sergeant-at-Arms' Office met to discuss the events of the day, including the seating plan, as per usual practice. While the appropriate information was made available to all concerned, it appears that it was not transmitted properly by Parliamentary Protective Service to the guest of the Member for Mégantic—L'Érable. The member's frustration is understandable as this miscommunication led to his guest being repeatedly refused access until he took it upon himself to escort her to the galleries.

[English]

As Speaker, I have responsibility for administrative matters, including the galleries, and I am committed to ensuring that guests from all sides of this House be allowed to attend our proceedings. I will continue to work with the Sergeant-at-Arms' office and the Parliamentary Protective Service so that communications between the various services are improved and solutions are put forward to prevent these kinds of incidents in the future.

I thank all hon. members for their attention.

* * *

● (1525)

PRIVILEGE

INFORMATION PRESENTED BY GOVERNMENT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on March 21, 2018, by the hon. House leader for the official opposition concerning answers provided to the House during oral questions by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the Opposition House Leader for having raised this matter, as well as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader and the member for Durham for their comments.

Government Orders

[English]

In raising the matter, the House leader for the official opposition contended that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness provided contradictory answers to the House on February 26th and 27th in response to a simple question about who was responsible for an invitation sent to Mr. Jaspal Atwal for an event during the Prime Minister's recent visit to India. She argued that despite the members' right to obtain accurate and non-conflicting information when asking questions of the government, the government refuses to clarify the matter.

On March 27, the member for Durham added a second allegation, that of conflicting answers as to the confidentiality of information provided by the Prime Minister's national security adviser in a briefing to journalists about the same matter.

[Translation]

The parliamentary secretary argued that the question of privilege was not anything more than a matter of debate given that it concerns a dispute as to accuracy of answers to oral questions and that members must be taken at their word.

To summarize this issue, the Chair is being asked to decide whether answers provided by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness are, in fact, contradictory and, ultimately, provide a conclusive finding of fact in the matter.

[English]

This presupposes an authority that I, as Speaker, do not have. As members are only too aware, the role of the Speaker as it relates to the accuracy of statements is very restricted, as I can determine neither their veracity nor their consistency with prior statements. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, states, at page 529:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions.

[Translation]

Furthermore, as I had cause to say on May 18, 2017, at page 11389 of *Debates*:

As members will know, the exchange of information in this place is constantly subject to varying and, yes, contradictory, views and perceptions. This, of course, heightens the risk that, inadvertently, a member making a statement may be mistaken, or, in turn, that a member listening may misunderstand what another has stated.

Speaker Jerome alluded to a similar situation, stating on June 4, 1975, on page 6431 of *Debates*:

...a dispute as to facts, a dispute as to opinions and a dispute as to conclusions to be drawn from an allegation of fact is a matter of debate and not a question of privilege.

● (1530)

[English]

For the Chair to accept an accusation that the House was deliberately misled, it must be able to ascertain with a high degree of certainty that the statement was in fact misleading, that the member knew when making the statement that it was incorrect, and that the member intended to mislead the House by making the statement.

While the Chair understands that the significant complexity and the considerable media coverage of the issue may be conducive to

different interpretations, the Chair is not convinced that the House has been deliberately misled. Accordingly, I cannot conclude that there is a *prima facie* question of privilege in this matter.

I would like to thank hon. members for their attention.

Debate, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, who has been waiting patiently.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2018, NO. 1

The House resumed from April 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-74, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 27, 2018 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a huge honour to rise today to speak to the budget implementation act and certainly to represent the NDP as the critic for veterans affairs and for small business and tourism.

I will talk about the economic vision presented by this budget and how it would do nothing to address the huge gap between Canada's wealthiest and the rest of Canadians, specifically the people back home in my riding on Vancouver Island.

In terms of lifting up the middle class and those working to join the middle class, something the Liberal government talks about all the time, the budget implementation bill offers no real plan to reduce inequality or to build an economy that would benefit all Canadians. This bill would create an uneven playing field, where only the few at the top could benefit at the expense of everyone else.

The people in my riding are not able to recover from the boom-and-bust economy of the past, because the federal government prefers to take money when times are good and ignores needs when times are tough. To know what the Liberals got wrong and are ignoring in this bill, we can look at the facts.

Today two Canadian billionaire businessmen own as much wealth as 11 million Canadians altogether. More than four million Canadians are living with food insecurity, including 1.15 million children. That is unacceptable.

A June 2017 report by the Parliamentary Budget Officer showed that for every \$100 of available income, Canadians have \$171 in household debt.

In Port Alberni, where I live, more than one-third of children live in poverty. Parksville-Qualicum has the highest median age of all ridings across Canada, and I often hear from seniors who forgo buying medicine because they need to pay rent or buy food.

On the west coast, we need to protect our water from plastic, garbage, and marine debris, something that is not even included in the oceans protection plan. It is not mentioned once.

Government Orders

Everywhere in my riding small business owners are being inundated by red tape, soaring merchant fees, and the new confusing tax measures implemented on income sprinkling.

This budget implementation bill contains zero measures to truly address tax evasion. The Liberal government is not taking any action to eliminate the tax loopholes associated with stock options for wealthy CEOs. They cost taxpayers a billion dollars a year, and 92% of the benefit goes to the 1%. That is not helping the middle class. In terms of tax havens, the Conference Board of Canada has said that they are costing taxpayers up to \$47 billion.

This bill is 556 pages long and amends 44 pieces of legislation, even though the Liberals promised to abolish the use of undemocratic omnibus bills. This is unacceptable.

We want to present solutions to the government. We have been presenting speakers on many solutions.

Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with my great colleague from Trois-Rivières, our transport critic. He is also going to present some great ideas and concerns about this budget.

I am going to speak as the critic for small business. One thing we are grateful for is that the government finally reduced the small business tax from 11% to 9%, something the late Jack Layton put forward and that New Democrats have been fighting for. Unfortunately, the Liberals only did this when they were in quicksand when they failed to roll out their small business tax proposals last summer and tried to do it in a very short period of time.

We have been raising concerns about merchant fees. I am going to quote this *Globe and Mail* article, from March 24, 2017, which states:

Worldwide, the EU, Australia, Switzerland and Israel, among others, have all moved to cap interchange rates. In Canada, the average interchange rate is currently 1.5 per cent, with some card fees running as high as 2.25 per cent. By contrast, in the U.K., the interchange rate is capped at 0.3 per cent, in France at 0.28 per cent, and in Australia at 0.5 per cent. So Canadian merchants pay five times what merchants pay in Europe and three times what merchants pay in Australia, for exactly the same services.

This affects businesses in Courtenay, Cumberland, Parksville, Qualicum, Tofino, and right across this country. This is unacceptable. In fact, it costs Canadian consumers over \$5 billion, and merchants as well. We know that Visa and Mastercard, which together account for 92% of the credit card market, have a monopoly in this sector.

• (1535)

There was a bill, Bill C-236, an act to amend the Payment Card Networks Act, put forward by my colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles in the fall of 2016. It has been moved 19 times. We have a lot of questions. Who is the government protecting? We know who it is protecting: its friends on Bay Street. Otherwise, it would have brought that bill for debate here to the floor of the House of Commons, where it belongs. It would have done the right thing and represented the people it promised it was going to represent. In fact, the member had support from the Quebec Convenience Stores Association and the Retail Council of Canada. They are waiting. It has been almost two years of waiting for the debate to even begin.

Why is the finance minister not bringing forward a proposal to support people in small business?

That is just one of the things we would like to see happen. We would like to see the government come forward with another proposal. My colleague brought forward a bill to make sure that business people are not charged more money when they sell their business to one of their family members. We need to make it easier for intergenerational transfers of businesses, not harder. Right now, those who sell their business to someone at arm's length pay a greater capital gain. That is not acceptable. We are standing up for people in small business because we understand how important small businesses are in building our economy. They are the job creators in our communities.

As the critic for veterans affairs, I would like to turn my attention to our veterans. Our veterans, as well as their dependants and survivors, should be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. That is all we ask, and we think it makes sense. The uniqueness of their profession, the obligations, sacrifices, demands, and experiences of such a profession also impact their family members. It affects all of them. Any decision regarding the care, treatment, re-establishment in civil life, or benefits of the person to be provided should be made in a timely manner. We are not seeing that. It is unacceptable. We see long wait times. Currently, the government has a huge transition gap. Last fall, we heard there were 29,000 veterans disability benefit applications waiting in the queue, and approximately 9,000 applications were well beyond the service standard.

The government has now committed \$42.8 million over two years to address the backlog in processing the increased number of claims, but it has not told us what it would cost to get it to zero. It has to get to zero. That is what veterans deserve. We have a lot of questions.

It is our understanding that the department asked for double that amount. That did not happen. The government made a promise in its last budget that it would make sure there were case workers at a ratio of 25:1. It was not mentioned this year, so maybe that platform has been abandoned. On the education benefit, the government promised \$80 million. When we look at the budget, now it is \$133.9 million over six years. That is \$22 million. How did the Liberals come up with a plan that now they are going to follow through with 27.5% of the promise they made to veterans? That is totally unacceptable.

On the pension for life, clearly the Liberals are not delivering on their promise. When two veterans fought in the same war, how can one get less than the other? That is totally unacceptable, and Canadians do not accept it.

Government Orders

In my riding, we put forward great proposals, and they have not been supported by the government. One example is a deep sea port in Port Alberni, where BC Ferries wants to do shipbuilding and infrastructure upgrades, but we have not seen the investment in the port. This could be a great opportunity for a place that has the highest unemployment rate in southwestern British Columbia.

The opportunities are endless, and the government is failing to deliver. There are 1.2 million Canadians living with disabilities, and the government has not enacted a plan to get those people back to work with a return to work strategy that could be brought forward. When it comes to veterans, 30% of case workers in the United States are former veterans. Right now, we are not even close. We do not even have a target and we do not have a plan to get them in place.

• (1540)

In terms of the economy where I live in coastal B.C., ocean protection is of utmost priority, not just for a clean working environment, which we rely on, but also for our salmon. The government promised coastal restoration funds, \$75 million over five years, but when we talk to the groups that are protecting our salmon, investing in salmon protection and enhancement and restoration, they are not getting the money. In fact, our hatcheries have not seen an increase in 28 years.

I could bring forward many concerns and proposals, things that are missing in this budget, but I will wait for the questions. I will try to share them through the questions. I will also continue to bring forward our concerns and solutions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been a government that has provided many solutions. By working with Canadians, we have seen tangible results.

The member talked about the importance of small businesses, something which our current Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Prime Minister, and the caucus as a whole have recognized. When we gave the tax break to Canada's middle class, it literally put hundreds of millions of dollars back into the pockets of Canadians. Those Canadians then had an increase in disposable income. That means there are more people eating out, more home renovations being done, more opportunities that lead to businesses being able to expand. Then we look at the current budget, where we have a decrease in the small business tax. Again, this is supporting small businesses. That has been a general theme since day one of this government, recognizing that by doing that, we are supporting Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it.

Would my colleague not agree that we need to continue to work with Canadians and businesses as a whole in order to move the economy forward?

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, it is really bold of the government members to think they are champions for small business, when the rhetoric from the Prime Minister before the small business tax cut was to call them tax cheats. In fact, the government has invested \$1 billion in so-called chasing tax evaders, but the government is really focused on small business people. That is what we are hearing right across the board.

When it comes to small business people, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism said at the Standing Committee on International Trade that the tax break was a great sound bite but it did not make sense.

The only reason the Liberals honoured the commitment was they were in quicksand for their terrible rollout of a small business tax proposal without consulting Canadians and doing it over the summer months.

New Democrats understand that putting money in the hands of small business people builds communities and invests in communities. The multiplier effect makes sense. That is why I am also bringing forward the concerns around merchant fees. It is about putting money in the pockets of small business people, not those on Bay Street, not like the Liberals have been doing. Clearly, the Liberals' priority is Bay Street, protecting CEO stock option loopholes, and tax evaders. It is not small business, unless it is convenient for them.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my friend from Courtenay—Alberni on his great speech. We are both Vancouver Islanders. I really appreciate the passion he brings to this place on behalf of his constituents in the beautiful riding he represents.

I was really interested in the part of his speech that dealt with credit card merchant fees, because it appears to me that this is a solution to a long-standing problem for small business that would cost nothing to the government. Visa and MasterCard make huge profits. We can look at the margins that small businesses operate under, at how close they are cutting it to breaking even.

From my colleague's experience of owning a small business, from being on a local chamber of commerce, can he expand a bit on how a rate decrease would actually benefit small businesses in their ability to reinvest in their operations and maybe even hire new employees or give their employees pay raises?

• (1545)

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right that every dollar counts for small business people. In fact, a study just came out which said that 50% of Canadians are within \$200 a month of not paying their bills. It clearly shows that people are struggling. In fact, many Canadians are having to go out and start small businesses because we have lost good, middle-class jobs from the consecutive failed policies of Conservative and Liberal governments.

I think it is just about fairness, too. It is not just about putting money in their pockets. In Australia and Europe how is it that governments have capped merchant fees in some cases at five times lower than what Canada is doing? We know why. It is because the government is protecting its friends on Bay Street and in the big banks.

Government Orders

Small business people need to know they are a priority. Every dollar counts. The member is absolutely right. Small business people are the job creators. They are the ones who hire people. That money would go a long way. As a former small business person, former executive director of a very successful chamber of commerce, I know all too well that this is very important. Every dollar counts when running a business. Fairness is very important, and small business people have not been treated fairly in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to have a chance to speak.

[English]

First of all, I want to thank my colleague from Courtenay—Alberni for splitting his time to give me the opportunity to speak to this important bill.

[Translation]

With so little time to speak, it is a bit hard for me to cover both the form and the substance of this bill. I am going to focus on the substance, but first I will take a minute at least to talk about the form. This bill continues the unbroken tradition, maintained by successive Conservative and Liberal governments, of saying one thing and doing another. The Liberals pledged to ban omnibus bills, yet that is exactly what we have before us today. This bill is 566 pages long and amends or repeals 44 acts. Worse still, the task of studying this massive document in its entirety will be assigned to a single committee, whose members will not only need to have all of the necessary skills, but will need to have them within a specified period. That will make it hard for the committee to hear from experts in finance, environment, and all other sectors affected by the bill. It seems to me that it would be easy to cover more ground and get more done if the work of studying this bill were split up, as it should be. Now I will stop talking about the form of the bill, because the substance is far more important.

Since I only have about nine minutes to do this analysis, I chose to look at things from the point of view of an ordinary Canadian, of a person from my riding who is looking at and analyzing the proposed budget. I would like to draw a quick parallel with tax time, which we are all experiencing right now. We have likely all had the experience of filling out our tax return and noticing that we are getting a tax refund, that we have overpaid, and that the federal or provincial government has to pay us back. Every time this happens, we cannot help but smile, even though there is really no reason to.

This tax refund is our own money, money we overpaid, that is coming back to us. However, since we did not expect it, it makes us happy. When people from my riding look at and analyze the proposed budget, they do pretty much the same thing. They search through the budget looking for the benefits they will derive from their investment in the government. What does this budget do for me? How will the taxes that I paid the Government of Quebec or the Government of Canada come back to me in the form of services or improvements to my quality of life?

The Liberals are constantly repeating that Canada's economy is doing well. I am not objecting to that. However, every time I meet with my constituents, they tell me that it is odd for the government to say that the economy is doing better than ever because they are not

seeing any difference in their personal finances and are still having trouble making ends meet.

The following analysis is based upon the fact that this budget ignores the concerns of the people of Trois-Rivières. I want to talk about pyrrhotite victims. The Liberal government boasts that it is paying \$30 million, or \$10 million a year over three years, to help pyrrhotite victims. Ten million dollars a year would help lift about ten families out of poverty, but there are hundreds of them. Furthermore, these are the ones who are eligible for compensation, in accordance with the 0.23% baseline established in the first ruling. A large number of building owners in Trois-Rivières and Mauricie are struggling because pyrrhotite the level in the concrete is less than 0.23%. These buildings are in the grey zone, between the 0.23% baseline and the 0% federal standard. As the Canada Building Code standards are being revised this year, there is no money in this budget set aside for a scientific study on quality standards for concrete aggregates. That is completely absurd.

• (1550)

What about the Lake Saint-Pierre victims in Yamachiche, which is not far from where I live? Waves over 10 metres high did some major damage there, destroying the exteriors of people's primary and secondary residences. Those victims have been waiting a whole year for the Minister of Transport to send some kind of signal about possible compensation for the damage, but there is nothing about that in the budget, nothing at all.

What about the high-frequency train? To be polite, I will call it consensus, but I suspect there is actually unanimity. People have been waiting years for a high-frequency Quebec City-Windsor train that goes through Trois-Rivières, Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. The people of Trois-Rivières have been waiting 25 years for the train to come back. All the stars are aligned except for one, and I am not talking about some easily dealt with bit player. I am talking about the Liberal government, which has not seen fit to come up with the cash that would make this project a reality despite the fact that all the stakeholders agree on where it should go, what technology should be used, and how important it is. I have a feeling the government is putting the long-awaited announcement off for a year so it can get more mileage out of it during an election year.

With the current upturn in the economy, the gap between the wealthy, the richest of our society, and the poor is growing rather than shrinking. While this is happening, we are still debating the relevance of having a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. Can I just say that \$15 an hour is not exactly rolling in it? People who earn \$15 an hour can barely keep their heads above water. Why, then, in a budget that is supposed to give clear direction and share the wealth that we have managed to collectively create in this country, why is it impossible to adequately support people who are struggling the most? We were not even talking about \$15 an hour in one fell swoop. We were talking about eventually reaching \$15 an hour over the course of a mandate, but no, the government refused. That is unacceptable.

Routine Proceedings

We could also talk about employment insurance. The Liberal government did make some changes to employment insurance to make itself look good. There are actually some initiatives that are promising. The waiting period is being decreased by one week. No one will oppose that. Whether it is for sickness benefits or compassionate care benefits, no one will oppose it. The big problem is that, at this time, the Liberal government has not budged one iota on measures to make employment insurance accessible. Thus, all the fine measures proposed by the government cannot be accessed if a worker does not qualify for employment insurance when needed. Currently, less than four workers in 10 who have paid into the plan qualify for EI when they need it.

We could also talk about pensions. When we talk about pensions for our seniors, especially in Trois-Rivières, we know that once again we are not talking about the wealthiest people in society. What enhancements has the government made? Not many. What has been done to protect the Canada pension plan? It takes an NDP member to get things done. Thank goodness, we are here.

We could talk about pay equity. The women in our ridings, like almost all of my colleagues in the House, welcomed gender parity in cabinet when the member for Papineau was elected Prime Minister, but workers want parity too. When will they have equal pay? It seems they may be waiting a long time. There are so many more examples.

• (1555)

The Liberal budget mainly seeks to fulfill the aspirations and desires of party friends and the biggest financial players, and it overlooks the middle class. The Liberals never forget to talk about the middle class in their speeches, but they are not walking the talk in their budget.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked a lot about income equality. We would have to go back many years to find a government that has been more progressive in dealing with this issue.

I talked about the tax break for Canada's middle class in a previous question. This tax break would put hundreds of millions of dollars in the pockets of Canadians. At the same time, we also increased taxes on Canada's 1%.

We also brought in a budget that saw literally millions of dollars put into the Canada child benefit program and the guaranteed income supplement, lifting tens of thousands of children and seniors out of poverty. We have seen strong social policy, such as our housing strategy, and billions of dollars put into infrastructure.

One would think that with progressive budgets like this the NDP would support them. Why does the NDP continue to vote against these types of initiatives to ensure there will be less income inequality?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comment. Once again, we can recognize the Liberal strategy of starting off with a subject, in this case equity, and then going off on a

major tangent to boast about the virtues of the Liberal government before trying to come up with a question.

I would like to come back to the crux of the matter: tax fairness. The parliamentary secretary talked about tax fairness at the beginning of his remarks and about going back many years, so he probably knows that Quebec resolved the issue of tax fairness and pay equity many years ago.

Why then does the government not learn from Quebec's success and introduce practical measures in the budget to implement pay equity within a certain time frame rather than just talking about it?

• (1600)

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Trois-Rivières raised the issue of tax fairness and rightly so.

When my colleague from Joliette arrived here the first thing he did was raise the issue of tax unfairness as it relates to tax havens. Everyone is familiar with the idiom, the elephant in the room. I wonder how my colleague from Trois-Rivières would describe the fact that none of the needs that he listed are reflected in the budget at all.

There are people, companies, and corporations that are not paying their fair share of taxes. They are benefiting from the government's largesse since the Minister of Finance is encouraging tax havens. I would like my colleague's take on this bias and the ease with which the Minister of Finance promotes tax avoidance.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. I will not describe the budget because there are no words for it.

The Liberals lack imagination when it comes to combatting tax evasion and tax havens, but without digging too deep into their budget we might have expected them to keep their promise to close the tax loophole on CEO stock options. The public purse loses \$800 million a year because of this measure that the Liberals promised to get rid of during the campaign.

We are not asking the Liberals to agree to an opposition proposal, no matter how sensible it might be. We are simply asking them to keep their own promises. It is 2018 and we have yet to hear a peep about this.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

MOTION FOR TRAVEL

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I suspect that if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous support for the following, as there has been consultation that has taken place among the parties and independent members. It is all related to travel for standing committees.

Government Orders

I move:

That, in relation to its study on needs and issues specific to indigenous veterans, seven members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to Victoria, British Columbia; Calgary, Alberta; Beauval, Saskatchewan; Hamilton, Six Nations Indian Reserve No. 40, and Toronto, Ontario; and Halifax, Millbrook First Nation, Truro, and Indian Brook First Nation, Nova Scotia, in the spring of 2018 and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its study on advancements of technology and research in the agriculture industry that can support Canadian exports, seven members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food be authorized to travel to Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec; Guelph, Ontario; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and Vancouver, British Columbia, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its study on priorities of Canadian stakeholders having an interest in bilateral and trilateral trade in North America, seven members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., United States of America, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its study on migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century, seven members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be authorized to travel to Kampala, Bundibugyo, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees refugee and settlement camps, Uganda; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; and Nairobi and the UNHCR refugee and settlement camps, Kenya, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its study on Canada's engagement in Asia, seven members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be authorized to travel to Tokyo, Japan; Seoul, South Korea; and Manila, Philippines, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its statutory review of the Proceeds of Crime and Terrorist Financing Act, seven members of the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to travel to Toronto, Ontario; London, United Kingdom; and Washington, D.C., and New York, New York, United States of America, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its study on the current state of Department of Fisheries and Oceans' small craft harbours, seven members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to travel to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; Magdalen Islands, Quebec; Charlottetown and Summerside, Prince Edward Island; Miramichi, New Brunswick; and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its statutory review of the Copyright Act, seven members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be authorized to travel to Halifax, Nova Scotia; Montréal, Quebec; Toronto, Ontario; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Vancouver, British Columbia, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its study on Canada's involvement in NATO, seven members of the Standing Committee on National Defence be authorized to travel to Petawawa, Ontario, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

That, in relation to its study on indigenous people in the correctional system, seven members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security be authorized to travel to Québec and Donnacona, Quebec; Saskatoon, Duck Lake, and Maple Creek, Saskatchewan; and Medicine Hat, Mâskwâcis, and Edmonton, Alberta, in the spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

• (1605)

That, in relation to its study on the Canadian Transportation and Logistics Strategy, seven members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities be authorized to travel to Vancouver, British Columbia, and Seattle, Washington, United States of America, in the Spring of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2018, NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-74, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 27, 2018 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hard-working MP for Ottawa West—Nepean.

I am pleased to rise today to talk about Bill C-74, the budget implementation act. This budget is focused on one principle, and that is to make sure everyone has a fair chance to succeed and realize his or her dreams. The government's focus has been to bring down barriers that are holding our economy back and to make sure our economy grows in a way that makes middle-class families stronger.

I am proud to share the news of that success with the House today. The numbers are clear. Our economy is growing and families are getting stronger.

Over the last two years, our economy has started to grow faster than the entire G7. More than 600,000 jobs have been created, and the unemployment rate is down to a nearly 40-year low. Middle-class Canadians are feeling better about their future, whether they want to pay down debt, save for their first home, or go back to school to train for a new job. We are proud to support them by making smart investments in the things that are important.

We raised taxes for the top 1% so that we could lower them for middle-class families.

Through the Canada child benefit, we also increased support for nine out of 10 families, putting more money, tax-free, in the pockets of parents for them to spend on things that they need.

There is still a lot more to do to make sure that the benefits of a growing economy are felt by more and more people, and that is why we are taking action through budget 2018 to do that.

We are creating opportunities where every Canadian has a real and fair chance to work and to succeed, and that includes Canada's hard-working women. By reducing the gender wage gap and increasing the participation of women in the labour force, we are growing the economy in a way that helps all Canadians. A recent Royal Bank study estimates that if women participated in our workforce at the rate men do today, we would boost the size of Canada's economy by 4%, which is equivalent to \$85 billion.

Government Orders

We also need to make sure that those currently working are supported and able to keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets. That is why budget 2018 introduces the Canada workers benefit, a new tax benefit that would put more money in the pockets of low-income workers. That is real help to more than two million Canadians who are working hard to join the middle class. Low-income workers earning \$15,000 could receive almost \$500 more from the Canada workers benefit in 2019 than they would have received in 2018. Altogether, these actions mean almost \$1 billion of new support for low-income workers under the Canada workers benefit.

Like the Canada workers benefit, the Canada child benefit is a key part of our plan to strengthen the middle class and help the people who are working hard to join it.

● (1610)

During the first benefit year, over three million families received more than \$23 billion in Canada child benefit payments. Nine out of 10 families are receiving on average almost \$2,300 more in benefits, tax free.

In my riding of Surrey—Newton, every month more than \$8 million dollars are delivered to families that need it the most. This money helps pay for day care, food, and so many other supplies that are critical to healthy and happy families.

Budget 2018 also reflects the priorities of Surrey—Newton by making investments in building more affordable housing, tackling the issue of guns and gangs, building more transit, and cutting small business taxes.

To make our streets safer, we are investing over \$300 million over the next five years and \$100 million a year after that to bring together all levels of government to increase intelligence of illegal trafficking, border security, and support for police.

However, we also need to support those needing treatment. That is why we are investing over \$230 million over the next five years to work with provinces to expand programs that provide treatment and support to those with addictions.

We are also making historic investments to build rapid transit across Canada. For British Columbia, we have committed \$4.1 billion that will bring more buses and build rapid transit in Surrey.

We are also cutting taxes for small businesses from 11% to 9%. This will save small businesses money and keep Canada competitive.

Surrey attracts thousands of young families and new Canadians every year. They bring with them their hard work, willpower, and innovative ideas and start-up businesses to help achieve their dreams. We want to support them. I started my small business in Surrey because I knew how great a place it was. I am very proud and delighted to raise my family and run my business in Surrey—Newton.

These are some of the smart investments that are going to make a real difference to all Canadians by giving them the tools, support, and opportunities to reach their full potential and realize their dreams. Budgets are about choices. Do we invest in our future or

make cuts? How do we support the middle class? How do we work to make Canada a prosperous and strong nation where every Canadian can fulfill their dreams?

I am proud we made the choices that invest in making families stronger, furthering equality, and building infrastructure that support Canadians and future generations. If people work hard, they deserve a fair chance to succeed. It is our job here to eliminate the barriers that stand in the way of that. I am proud that budget 2018 makes that progress.

The equality, freedom and justice of our country is what the world looks to. We need to keep on ensuring we do everything we can to maintain that level so we remain a model and true leader in the world for equality.

● (1615)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the member completely avoided talking about the fiscal situation that Canada will be facing with the sky-high deficits and this incredible new debt that we are taking on, so I do not really have a question for the member.

I want to quote directly from the budget. We are looking at an \$18.1-billion deficit, which is three times larger than what was promised two and a half years ago during the election. If the 2008 recession repeated itself, we would be looking at a \$42.7-billion deficit. That's because the government has basically frittered away all of the controls on spending in order to meet the goals it has in mind, but none of those goals are about restructuring and ensuring the stability of Canada's finances for the future.

It is always nice to talk about how much money the Liberals are supposedly shovelling out the door to Canadians. What they are not saying is that they are borrowing that money. All of those young Canadians who are getting the child benefit today are going to be asked to pay it all back, plus interest, in the future. Page 359 of the budget also shows that if we add up all federal government debt, plus crown corporation debt where a lot of this debt is now hidden, they have over a trillion dollars in borrowing in 2019. That is debt that our kids and their kids and their kids will have to pay in the future.

As much as the member may believe this is good for the people of his riding, the people in British Columbia, let me give a quick example in relation to deficits: they will need two and a half Trans Mountain pipelines just to balance the budget, and right now they do not even have one.

● (1620)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Calgary Shepard for raising this issue. I want to tell the hon. member and Canadians that we are growing the economy in a way that benefits the middle class, and that plan is working. Since November 2015, the economy has created nearly 600,000 new jobs, and the unemployment rate is the lowest in 40 years. With our plan, the debt-to-GDP ratio is being lowered and will fall to 28%, the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio among G7 countries.

Government Orders

This means our debt is affordable and our deficit will be reduced in a way that is a responsible part of our economy and ensures that we make smart investments in people and in businesses that are going to make a difference in the coming years.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noticed my colleague mentioned, quite a few times, people working hard to join the middle class. I just want to remind the member that the government said it would move forward with pay equity legislation because women in Canada make less than men in Canada, and it will not matter how hard women work if they are being discriminated against.

Why is there no money in this budget to implement pay equity legislation? The government has said it is a feminist government. We have been waiting. We have been told it is time to act. We would like to see some action. I would like an answer from my hon. colleague as to when we are going to see that action.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister and this government understand well that gender equity is not only the right thing to do for Canadians but also a smart thing to do. That is why we want to make sure that Canadian women get what they deserve, and they deserve more. In today's age we can see that Canadian women are among the world's most educated women. The hon. member for Saskatoon West brought up a very genuine concern about the legislation. I can assure her that this legislation will be brought forward this year, and I am certain that when it comes forward, the hon. member will be able to support it and we will be able to pass that legislation.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a tremendous pleasure to rise today to speak to the budget implementation act, the first step in implementing budget 2018, a truly progressive, activist budget that will create even more opportunities for Canadians.

This budget is the first to integrate a full gender-based-plus analysis to make sure that women in Canada are included in every aspect of the budget. It is significant to me that the budget does not look at women only as beneficiaries of government policy but as full contributors to our national economy, because we know that we see better outcomes when women and diverse groups of Canadians are included.

Budget 2018 is about growth, increasing the GDP, and ensuring that everyone can contribute to their fullest potential.

[*Translation*]

Canada is a country built on hard work, and we solve problems by working tirelessly and helping each other. The budget also invests in people. Over the past two years, our economy has been growing and strengthening. Our investments are working.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Our plan to invest in Canadians is working. Our current GDP growth is the highest in the G7, at 3.2%. For comparison, the second-highest are Germany and the U.S., at only 2.4%. We have a low and declining debt-to-GDP ratio. The proportion of our debt compared to our income is going to be the lowest that we have seen in 40 years.

The International Monetary Fund says Canada's net debt-to-GDP ratio is the lowest in the G7, and in fact it is less than half the G7 average. The IMF says that Canada's economic policies should go viral. What this means for Canadians is over 600,000 new jobs. The unemployment rate has dropped from 7.1% to 5.7% since we took office. That is the lowest unemployment rate in the last 46 years, in my lifetime.

Why are we seeing this growth? It is because we are investing in the future. We are making smart investments in infrastructure and innovation, and we are seeing the impact of these investments in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean. There is \$5 million for Nelson House women's shelter. LRT phase 2 will bring light rail to Algonquin College and all the way to Moodie Drive. We are investing in 42 new affordable housing units for seniors linked to the Carlington Community Health Centre, and there is \$22 million to Algonquin College for a new centre for innovation and entrepreneurship, including indigenous entrepreneurship.

Our Canada child benefit has raised 300,000 children out of poverty in our country. In Ottawa West—Nepean, over 16,000 children benefit. On average, each family is getting about \$640 a month tax free.

Our new Canada workers benefit will lift 70,000 low-income Canadian workers out of poverty. In fact, a worker earning \$15,000 a year will receive \$500 more and be able to take home more of his or her paycheque.

We have invested \$5 billion in mental health and \$6 billion in home care, on top of a \$1.4-billion increase in the Canada health transfer, and this budget adds \$20 million for autism.

We are supporting seniors with the increase to the GIS of \$967 a year for the poorest seniors and a new \$20-million fund for dementia caregivers, and we are enhancing the Canada pension plan so that in the future the maximum benefit is going to increase from \$13,600 a year to \$21,000 a year.

We have kept our promise on a pension for life for veterans. In fact, a 50-year-old fully disabled veteran will now be receiving \$9,000 a month tax free for the rest of his or her life.

We have introduced a national housing strategy that commits \$40 billion to cut homelessness in half in our country. There will be 100,000 new units, including new family housing units on Michèle Drive in Ottawa West—Nepean, and 300,000 units are going to be repaired or upgraded.

Here in the national capital region, I am very pleased to note there is \$55 million to the NCC for critical infrastructure and \$73 million toward a new national library combined with the Ottawa Public Library.

Government Orders

Our growth is taking place because we are working to ensure that we are not leaving out half of the population when it comes to our economic prosperity. I am talking about women.

Budget 2018 is significant in addressing the gender wage gap and enhancing women's workforce participation, which is not only the right thing to do but is good for the economy. We are doing this in a number of ways, including through proactive pay equity legislation based on the report of the special committee, which I was very proud to have chaired. I commend the work of the committee members from all parties.

There are five weeks of additional “use it or lose it” parental leave for the second parent, usually the father, which will rebalance the burden of caregiving in our country. There was \$7.5 billion in previous budgets for child care, which is creating over 40,000 affordable child care spaces. There are changes to EI that allow more flexibility for parents and caregivers. We are supporting women in high-income jobs, such as in STEM. There is \$1.4 billion in financing for women entrepreneurs, because we know that only 16% of businesses in Canada are owned by women, and we want that number to increase. There is also almost \$20 million in apprenticeship grants for women in the trades.

[*Translation*]

We are making Status of Women Canada its own department. We are allocating \$100 million to front-line organizations that support survivors of gender-based violence. We are extending the unified family court pilot project, to make it easier for people who are going through a separation or divorce, by allowing them to deal with a single legal system. We are providing legal assistance for victims of workplace sexual harassment.

• (1630)

[*English*]

I am also very proud that budget 2018 would increase our international assistance envelope by \$2 billion to make our feminist international development policy a reality. We know that we see more progress toward the sustainable development goals and longer lasting peace agreements and better outcomes when women are included in the design and implementation of development projects.

Our economic growth is also a result of a successful policy of progressive international trade. Between CETA and the CPTPP, our preferential market access for Canadian goods and services has increased from 31% to 63% of the global market.

[*Translation*]

Diversity is Canada's strength and is at the very heart of our identity. This is why our government committed to investing \$23 million in multiculturalism programs to find new ways to combat discrimination, with a focus on racism and discrimination against indigenous peoples.

[*English*]

Our most important relationship is with indigenous people. Over the past three budgets we have committed over \$13 billion for indigenous peoples, more than double what was in the Kelowna accord.

We are fully implementing Human Rights Tribunal orders regarding services to indigenous children. Almost 20,000 children are currently receiving care as a result.

Boil water advisories have been lifted in 52 communities, with 81 to go, and all of those will be done by 2021.

We are investing in housing, schools, recreational infrastructure, and mental health supports.

We are doing all of this while ensuring fairness in taxation. Canadians in the middle-income bracket are now paying 7% less in income tax, and those in the top 1% are paying more.

With respect to small businesses, 97% will see a decrease in their taxes.

We are going after overseas tax avoidance through 1,000 offshore audits, 40 criminal investigations, and \$44 million in penalties to third-party advisers.

We are investing in Canadians. Austerity was tried by the previous government and did not work for Canadians. We are growing income, and making benefits more inclusive. We are ensuring that women and other equity-seeking groups can be full and equal participants in our economy. We are already seeing the results, with the lowest unemployment rate and the strongest economy in the G7.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague and I have a question for her regarding the funding of and focus on seniors.

She highlighted that the government, in the 2016 budget, provided increased funding for the guaranteed income supplement, the GIS, and the OAS. In fact, there was support from all parties for that. However, that was two budgets ago. Last year the government did nothing other than to reannounce the 2016 GIS and OAS. In this year, the second year, there is no new announcements for seniors. It has reannounced and reannounced.

Seniors see that the government is ignoring them. Senior stakeholders across Canada are saying that seniors are being ignored because there is no minister for seniors. I believe the member cares about seniors. Does she think it is fair that seniors are being ignored again? She has made statements that were made two years ago. There is nothing new in the budget for seniors.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most important questions for my constituency, because it has a higher proportion of seniors on average than almost anywhere in the country. Therefore, I thank the member for bringing that up.

Government Orders

In fact, there is new money for seniors. Not only are we putting \$20 million into a dementia strategy, we are also looking at a very successful pilot project that happened in Atlantic Canada, and we are going to be expanding that.

The money that was mentioned in previous budgets is now starting to flow.

In this budget, we have also added caregiver benefits for those people who need to stay at home and need some flexibility to look after their aging parents. We have put more into home care, health care, and things that matter to seniors, including housing.

I am very proud the member has given me the opportunity to talk about the Carlington Community Health Centre in my riding. It has all of the health services and other social services that seniors need. We are building 42 new affordable seniors units for 80 seniors. They can go down the elevator and they have the health clinic and all the other services there. I hope that model will be an innovative approach which will be spread across the country.

We are for our seniors in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean and across the country.

• (1635)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to serve on the special committee for pay equity with my hon. colleague in 2016, which seems like a while ago now.

There was some disappointment that we did not have a unanimous report. None of the witnesses who came forward at that committee felt that it would take the government 18 months to implement pay equity legislation, so I was concerned. It is now well past 18 months. We are still looking for that implementation of pay equity legislation.

I wonder if the member can give us any idea of when we will actually see pay equity implemented for women working in the federal sector.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her hard work on the pay equity committee. I would note that the only criticism that was made of that report was that it was not going fast enough. There is a pretty good consensus across parties on the need for pay equity.

To answer the member's question in short, it will be this year. The budget actually includes proactive pay equity legislation, where pay equity will become a human right.

In fact, I was particularly pleased, because the budget goes even beyond the 2004 Bilson report and accepts the recommendations of our special committee on pay equity that pay equity apply not only to the federal public service and to the federally regulated sector, but also to all federal contractors. This is about the broadest definition that we can have of pay equity and pay transparency.

I am extremely pleased that we will be bringing in pay equity legislation that, once enacted, is going to cover 80% of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

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 Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for

Trois-Rivières, Housing; and the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, Taxation.

[*English*]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hard-working member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

The leader of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition said it best when he said that never before in Canadian history had a government spent so much to achieve so little.

As a member of Parliament, it is my honour and privilege to serve the people of Perth—Wellington and to represent their views in this place. When I rise in the chamber to speak, I like to do so with them in mind.

I think of the seniors in my riding who have worked hard all their lives and are now approaching their golden years, looking forward to their retirement. They have concerns because the government has left them without a minister responsible for seniors. They are concerned because the cost of living is going up and is sure to go up even higher with a carbon tax on everything.

I think of families, moms and dads in my riding who work hard, who put in extra hours so they can keep gas in the car, so they can pay their mortgage or their rent, so maybe they can put their kids into a sporting activity or sign them up for piano lessons or art classes, or maybe take a day off and go on a short family vacation with their kids. I think of those families that are working hard every day, but are not being listened to by the Liberal government.

I think of young people, people of my generation and younger, who are graduating from university, who are starting their first real job, who are trying to pay off their student loans and may put a few dollars away for that down payment to buy that first home. However, new rules and regulations are constantly coming out from the Liberal government that make it harder for those young people to get into that first home.

Especially in Perth—Wellington, where agriculture is the biggest driver of our local economy, I think of farmers, farm families that quite literally feed the world and yet we see nothing from the Liberal government.

It is even worse than that. We see a government that has over the past number of months, especially last summer with its proposed changes to corporate taxation measures, labelled farmers and farm families as tax cheats. I think of those people.

I think of seniors, of families, of young people, of farmers and farm families. This budget fails them.

In the short time I have on offer today, I would like to touch on four key points: the debt and the deficit; infrastructure; issues related to agriculture; and of course taxation.

Government Orders

For the third consecutive budget, the Liberal finance minister has blown past the Liberals' \$10-billion deficit projection promised in the election campaign. They promised three years of teeny tiny deficits and then a return to balance by 2019. This year we see an \$18.1 billion deficit and next year it will be \$17.5 billion. The government's own finance department projects that the government will not return to balanced budgets until 2045. What is worse is that there is not even a plan to return to balanced budgets.

When the government is asked in this place and in committee as to when it will return to balanced budgets, there is no answer. There is not even an acknowledgement of the question. This leads to two logical conclusions. Either the Liberals simply do not know, which is entirely possible with the Liberal government, or they do know and they are keeping it from Canadians. Canadians deserve to know, because this affects their lives. This affects how they raise their families, how they invest in their businesses, and how they expand the economy.

The Conservatives do not just believe in balanced budgets because we like the concept of them. We understand that if we do not take care of our own fiscal house, we cannot invest in the priorities of Canadians.

• (1640)

In the next number of years, the financing of the national debt will increase by \$8.7 billion. By 2022-23, that is \$8.7 billion more that will not go to help families. It will not go to help infrastructure investments in our rural and small-town communities. It is not going to be in health care transfers. It will not go into public safety measures. Rather, that is \$8.7 billion that will go to international financiers rather than being invested in the Canadian economy and in Canadians.

That leads me to the next point I would like to highlight, and that is the importance of infrastructure investment. I just mentioned the \$30 billion over three years, \$10 billion per year, that the Liberals promised their deficits would be. In exchange for these small deficits, they would increase infrastructure funding. However, here we see the government delaying its infrastructure funds to future years and yet we are still seeing massive overrun deficits. In fact, the budget forecasts that \$2.2 billion in infrastructure funding will be pushed back past 2019 and an additional \$2.4 billion will be pushed back past 2023.

It is not just the Conservatives who are raising the alarm on this, it is the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the same position the Liberals used to highlight when they were in opposition. In his most recent report, the PBO said, "Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the Government's \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan." The PBO requested the new plan, but it does not exist. He went on to say, "Roughly one-quarter of the funding allocated for infrastructure for 2016-17 to 2018-19 will lapse. Both legacy and new infrastructure programs are prone to large lapses." How can they spend \$180 billion on infrastructure without a plan? When it comes to the Liberals, they might try, but Canadians know better.

When I look at my rural communities, at the towns, small towns, and cities in Perth—Wellington, I see infrastructure projects that would have a meaningful impact on the local economy being looked

over. I see important projects like roads and bridges, water and waste water. I have communities that have development freezes on because they do not have the wastewater capacities to expand, and yet we see delay after delay from the Liberals when it comes to infrastructure funding. This type of delay is unacceptable, but it is because the Liberals do not have a plan. When they have no plan, they will fail and that is exactly what we are seeing with the Liberals.

I want to touch on agriculture. Agriculture is the economic driver of our communities, yet in this budget, it warranted barely even a mention. On our rural communities, there was barely a mention. On our farm families, there was barely a mention. The farmers and the farm families I talked to have concerns. They have concerns about the future of NAFTA, yet there is no plan from the Liberals. They are concerned about the added regulatory burden, and yet more and more regulation is being layered on them by the Liberals. People are worried about the impact of carbon taxes, and yet the Liberals are going full speed ahead. People are worried about things like the Canada food guide changes that could diminish dairy and red meat as part of the food guide, and they are worried about the negative impact front-of-package labelling could have on healthy food choices, like yogurt for example. These are the concerns I am hearing from the people of my riding.

This of course brings us to taxes. We have tax after tax from the Liberals. We have the carbon tax, which in effect will amount to a tax on everything. Anything that is transported by road will have a tax on it. Anything from food to goods and services will be taxed by the Liberals. In last year's budget, we saw the excise tax on alcohol with a permanent escalator tax, meaning that in perpetuity, taxes will be raised on these products year after year automatically without the approval of Parliament. This is simply wrong.

This budget fails. It fails Canadians. It fails to restrain deficits. It fails to invest in rural infrastructure. It fails in its lack of transparency. This budget is not good for Canadians. It will hurt Canadians. People in our rural communities, like those in Perth—Wellington, will be hurt the hardest.

• (1645)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague suggested this budget would hurt the most vulnerable Canadians. I would note that over the last two years, the Library of Parliament estimates we have lifted 700,000 people out of poverty, which perhaps corrects the record when my colleague suggests our spending has done so very little.

Government Orders

When we talk about the most vulnerable Canadians, we talk about what was the working income tax benefit and is now the Canada workers benefit, and we see a \$500-million increase, including making it automatic, which is another \$200-million increase per year for the people who need help the most. Surely that is helping the most vulnerable Canadians.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up the concept of the WITB, the working income tax benefit, which of course was introduced by our former Conservative government and our former minister of finance, the Hon. Jim Flaherty. It gives me a great opportunity to talk about the record of Jim Flaherty, a man who, during the early years when we were in a strong economic position, paid off \$40 billion of the national debt. He did that so that when we entered the global economic recession of 2008-09 we had the fiscal capacity, the financial room, to invest in key infrastructure projects that benefited the Canadian economy. It is because of the leadership of people like Jim Flaherty that we were able to come out of that recession stronger.

Now, in a time when the economy is growing, we have deficits. We have large deficits, meaning that if we were to enter another economic recession, we would not have the fiscal space or capacity to respond as we did in 2008-09 because of the strong leadership of Jim Flaherty.

• (1650)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much enjoyed the part of my colleague's speech about agriculture because I have the honour of serving as our party's agriculture critic. I very much agree with him that our farmers do such incredible work in this country and really are the lifeblood of so many rural communities, including mine on Vancouver Island.

When Canadians are trying to get service from the CRA these days, first of all, many are not able to get through. Those who get through are getting wrong information. The government likes to pay lip service to all these measures and say it is cracking down on tax evasion, but most of the difficulties seem to be landing on small business owners and small farmers. We are hearing about how the government is tackling tax evasion, but in reality it is only paying lip service.

Meanwhile, we get two classes of people in this country: those who play by the rules, and those who have a different set of rules that allow them to take advantage of these sweetheart deals.

We also have the Canada Infrastructure Bank, which is going to privatize our infrastructure, and where private investors are going to demand a rate of return that is ultimately going to cost the taxpayer more.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comments on these measures and how they really affect and trickle all the costs down to the members of society who need the help the most, while an upper tier gets all the benefits. I just do not see any action from this Liberal government to fundamentally tackle these problems in our society.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, my colleague hit on two key points: one, the challenges with the CRA, and two, the challenge of the infrastructure bank. I would even expand the infrastructure bank to include the Asian infrastructure bank, for which the government is sending half a billion dollars overseas to invest in infrastructure

there. These programs are not benefiting the rural communities the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford and I have in our constituencies. They are not providing the farmers and the farm families with the infrastructure needed to get their products and goods to market.

On the subject of the CRA, like many members on all sides of the House, I am often involved with casework with my constituents, helping them out when they face challenges with CRA. In the past couple of years I have been in office, I am finding that issues caused through challenges with the CRA have been steadily increasing.

I find this really problematic, because a lot of times those who are being faced with these challenges are those who are least able to deal with them. They are working part-time, working night shifts, or picking up extra hours to try to raise their families. Often, single parents are being faced with these measures from the CRA, and they are unable to deal with it. Dealing with these challenges is something we face in our office, because of the challenges the CRA is presenting them with.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with overwhelming confidence, which was given to me during my recent renomination by the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, that I participate in today's debate regarding the deteriorating state of finances in this country.

The 2018 deficit budget gets low marks for fiscal credibility. Deficit budget 2018 is a greed budget, much like deficit budget 2017. Nowhere is there any sign of evidence-based decision-making being used in the deficit budget. There is too much unaccounted-for new spending. Spending on government waste is growing too fast, and there is no real commitment to deficit elimination or the environment.

The budget has no fiscal credibility. The fiscal credibility of a budget can be judged against four basic principles. Fiscal policy must be realistic, responsible, prudent, and transparent.

First, fiscal policy must be realistic. Fiscal policy should be based on sound analysis and a careful, balanced view of economic and fiscal prospects, challenges, and risks.

The sound fiscal policy that was practised by the Conservative government has been replaced with subsidized environmentalism. Subsidized environmentalism in Canada is when one group of taxpayers is forced to pay carbon taxes to clean up actions and pollution by others.

An Ottawa Valley example of this is the creation of an Ottawa River watershed council bureaucracy. Technocrats then look for new ways to tax and regulate private property, while ignoring the fact that every year Ottawa—Gatineau dumps billions of litres of raw sewage into the Ottawa River.

Government Orders

Ontario taxpayers subsidize polluters in wealthy California, thanks to the signature Liberal policy of carbon taxes and the Toronto Liberal carbon credit swap auction. Forget the myth of so-called green jobs. The only green jobs are temporary and have come at a huge taxpayers' expense. Special tax benefits, including the federal government's accelerated capital cost allowance and the Canadian renewable and conservation expenses allowance, prop up the myth of green jobs.

Other subsidies, including the federal government's ecoENERGY for renewable power program, \$1.4 billion over five years in deficit budget 2017, and continuing large research and development assistance for industrial wind turbines, explain why the finance minister refuses to provide a realistic date to Canadians when the deficit budget will be balanced.

Take away the taxpayer handouts, and those temporary jobs quickly flee to the next foolish politician willing to pay "greenmail" with other people's money. Environmentalist David Suzuki has stated that only by reducing the standard of living of Canadians will Canada meet the reduction of emissions in the Paris accord. I congratulate someone for actually stating what that international agreement is really all about.

What does reducing economic growth mean? It is the year-to-year decrease in production, distribution, and consumption as expressed by gross domestic product, GDP. In the short term, borrowed money, the huge deficits buried in this deficit budget, hides the impending collapse of the Canadian economy. We can just think of Greece or Cyprus. Without economic growth, there will be no money to pay for the debt that is piling up on the backs of our children and their children. There will be no money to pay for health care, pensions, affordable housing, or cleaning up the environment.

The deficit budget is resulting in Conservatives attracting a new generation of Canadians, who are upset with the bad spending and big deficit budgets of the Liberal Party. I am now seeing more and more individuals who are cluing in to the radical, left-wing agenda of the Liberal Party, a party they might even have supported with a selfie, but not anymore. There is no doubt in the minds of these individuals that the radical, left-wing policies that have turned Ontario into a have-not province are being shoved down the throats of all Canadians by the puppet master, Gerald Butts. The Doctor Evil of Ontario politics, Gerald Butts was behind the Liberal "greed energy act", which lined the pockets of Liberal Party insiders with their industrial "Wynne" turbines. That is "wind" spelled W-y-n-n-e.

●(1655)

The resulting skyrocketing electricity prices led to seniors and others in Ontario on fixed incomes to suffer from energy poverty.

The carbon tax that Wynne put on electricity has now been carried forward by Butts to Ottawa. The Liberal Party has ordered all the provinces to charge carbon taxes. Thankfully, more and more Canadians have come to the conclusion that carbon taxes are nothing more than a green hustle. Carbon taxes are just that: taxes.

Adopting carbon taxes in Canada raises global carbon emissions by offshoring economic activity from relatively environmentally friendly places, like Canada, to places with lax environmental laws, like China. Data from the World Bank reveals that China, and other

developing countries, produce far more carbon per dollar of economic output, at purchasing power parity, than do western nations. China shows no signs of decreasing its emissions any time soon. China is currently building hundreds of new coal-fired power plants, which will ensure its CO₂ emissions continue to rise for decades to come.

Taken together, these facts mean that every factory pushed out of Canada due to carbon taxes actually increases global emissions dramatically, and this will continue to be the case for decades to come.

Mismanagement of the Canadian economy has resulted in the largest flight of capital since records started being collected. Domestic capital is being replaced by foreign capital. The problem the finance minister has created with his excessive borrowing is relying too much on foreign money to finance the deficit.

It is no secret that Gerald Butts, from his position in the Prime Minister's Office, has been working behind the scenes to shut down Canada's pipelines. His scheming is starting to fall apart with pipeline company Kinder Morgan calling out the federal government for its behind the scenes manipulations.

What the Liberal Party did not count on is one of Kinder Morgan's largest institutional investors, BlackRock, moving to protect the over 114 million shares it has at stake.

BlackRock is the largest institutional investor in the world, controlling trillions of dollars. BlackRock has been given preferential access to the federal infrastructure bank. A BlackRock executive sits on the finance minister's secretive advisory council on the economy.

BlackRock has basically told the federal government, "If you want us to put our private equity into your infrastructure bank, we expect lots of money. Protect our shares in Kinder Morgan." BlackRock is also saying that if the government plans to use the infrastructure bank to bail out the pipeline and it is using BlackRock's equity in its bank to do it, either the government guarantees BlackRock's investment or it walks.

How much is this going to cost Canadian taxpayers? Who will be on the hook to pay the interest charges? How much will it cost the municipalities to fight for the scarce dollars to borrow at high interest rates for roads and sewers from the federal infrastructure bank?

Is not the real reason the federal government is even being forced to act is to bail out Kinder Morgan's shareholders and institutional investors like BlackRock? Institutional investors hold over 63% of Kinder Morgan's stock. Keeping foreign institutional investors like BlackRock and Vanguard Group happy will cost Canadians dearly.

Government Orders

Canadians were made very aware through an unfortunate exchange the Minister of Environment had with Evan Solomon that she is not capable of defending her radical views without insulting Canadians. The dismissive attitude of the Prime Minister and his minister to independent viewpoints is encouraging more and more Canadians to see through the hidden agenda of radical environmentalism, carbon taxes, and pipeline regulations that are killing Canadian jobs. There are real environmental problems that are not getting attention because of carbon taxes.

Deficit budget 2018 fails to mention any of these current challenges. It makes no mention of defence. The defence department's deputy chief financial officer told parliamentarians when she appeared before committee that there is no list of projects that are being funded. It is all smoke and mirrors.

No one believes anything the finance minister is saying. Taxes are always just taxes, dollars taken away from people by government.

• (1700)

I conclude my participation in this debate to share the concern about the deteriorating state of the finances of the Canadian government, and what that means to average middle-class Canadian families who bear the brunt of bad spending. Everybody knows that today's budget deficits are tomorrow's tax increases. An election cannot come soon enough for the overburdened taxpayers of our country.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the member across the way that it is not all that bad. If she would stop reading the Conservative spin notes, she would find that there are a lot of wonderful things actually happening here in Canada.

The member said that the economy is in ruins, or she tried to suggest that, but we have over 600,000 new jobs. She must have been reflecting on the Harper years. In so many ways, her comments are just wrong. I cannot help but think if she is reading anything other than Conservative spin.

Does the member not recognize there are a lot of wonderful things happening in Canada today, especially if she compares us to any of the other G7 countries?

• (1705)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that we have seen this whole scenario already in Ontario. I know the member is from another province, but we have seen hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs in Ontario sent outside the country because of high carbon taxes. The taxes built into the electricity charges are called "a global adjustment", which is where they are hidden, just like the Liberals are trying to hide the carbon taxes on gas bills, and so on and so forth.

We have seen this happen in Ontario and now it is being replicated at the federal level. Just like Ontario which is pretty well bankrupt, so will be the country if the Liberal Party continues to rule after another election.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke's remarks, even though there are not a lot of times we

agree, I particularly enjoyed her description of the infrastructure bank, which is something we will share an opinion on with the Liberals giving preferential access to insiders.

I wonder if the member is bemused by the Liberals adopting her old government's strategy of omnibus bills. In particular, I noticed her remarks on the carbon tax. She certainly demonstrates that she is an independent thinker, and our views are obviously wildly different on this topic, but would she not agree that the bill ought to be separated so that we can have a clear debate and vote on things like the carbon tax?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, there is actually no point in separating out the carbon tax from the rest of the budget. It is all bad. It can just stay as all one piece and be voted as one.

As for the infrastructure bank, this is a situation where in my riding, for example, from Greater Madawaska to McNab-Braeside to Horton, Renfrew, Admaston/Bromley, Laurentian Valley, Laurentian Hills, Bonnechere Valley, and so on and so forth, all the way through to Head, Clara and Maria, these small, little municipalities, for the very necessary roads and bridges they need to fix, are going to be up against the international community with the infrastructure bank. This is not very fair, and it was the tax dollars from their constituents that are funding this whole thing.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg North who just asked a question should know exactly what the member was talking about when talked about the Wynne government in Ontario leaving a huge debt. His government is doing the same thing at the national level. If we look at just the one year that my colleague from Ontario was talking about earlier, about an \$8-billion addition to this year's debt, the federal government is going to add \$100 billion to the debt in Canada, if the Liberals are allowed to run out the five years that are in the present budget today. The member should know about that, because he comes from Manitoba where the NDP ran up huge deficits in those days. Now the Liberal government is trying to copy that at the national level.

I wonder if my colleague could continue to comment in regard to some of the further analysis that she knows of, because she is a member living in Ontario. It is a sad situation there. The Liberal provincial government of the day is running in an election that is only a few short months away and has indicated that the only way out of more debt is to add more debt.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, one of the more problematic aspects of this whole greed job was the fact that these contracts were given to Ontario Liberal Party insiders.

What we saw is that the millions of dollars would go to these companies, some of which were foreign, and then the premier would have these pay-to-play parties where those who came would pay thousands of dollars for a table. That is all funnelled back to Liberal Party coffers.

We know they have to be more creative at the federal level to do it, but we know it is all for the same thing. The Liberals are giving their friends the contracts, and somehow some of that money is going to find its way back so they can try to get back into power.

Government Orders

•(1710)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate, I just want to note that we have crossed the five-hour mark of this debate since the first round of debate on the question that is before the House. Consequently, all of the interventions from this point onward on this part of the debate will be limited to 10-minute speeches, followed by five minutes for questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Markham—Thornhill.

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on the budget implementation act.

Budget 2018 represents an opportunity to unlock the full potential of our economy by ensuring that every individual has the chance to succeed. As the member of Parliament for Markham—Thornhill, I am honoured to stand in this House and speak in support of this budget.

I have spent the last year in conversations with my constituents, meeting vibrant female entrepreneurs who had an idea and chased it, feeling the tide of representation finally moving in their favour; shaking the hands of the researchers who feel the support of their government as they reach for tomorrow's great discovery; and introducing myself to hard-working moms and dads, who work tirelessly to get their kids to school before the bell and for the first time have enough money to register their kids in soccer this summer.

I have seen, over this year, the effects of this government's intentional leadership in my community of Markham—Thornhill. Therefore, I am thrilled to support the continued decision of this government to place our country's shared goals at the centre of budget 2018. These are goals like ensuring that women and girls have an equal opportunity to thrive, preserving and celebrating the diversity that is so integral to the fabric of this country, and supporting middle-class families as the backbone of our economy.

Our budget is not just a fiscal plan but a plan for all Canadians. We believe that when each individual in our society is supported and given the chance to succeed, the entire country thrives.

[*Translation*]

Are we taking women in the workplace into consideration, for example?

[*English*]

It is for women like Vivian Chen, owner of Bakery 18 in Markham, whose business supplies large grocery chains and supports newcomers through stable employment. It is for women like Linda Zhang, the president of the Canada China Club, which is a not-for-profit that helps bring jobs and business opportunities to Markham and cities in Canada. It is for women like Sylvia Chan, owner of the Creative Genius Art Academy, an after-school art program that supports young artists in the community. Despite their shared ambition and success, these women still encounter obstacles as a result of being women.

With budget 2018, we are investing in levelling the playing field. Our new women entrepreneurship strategy provides \$1.6 billion over three years in financing for women in business. We are also providing \$130 million over five years for venture capital investments for women-led tech firms and \$115 million to address

the challenges women entrepreneurs face when developing and growing their businesses. With budget 2018, we are taking action to boost women entrepreneurs like Vivian, Linda, and Sylvia in Markham—Thornhill and across our country.

What is more, our government is taking a historic step to introduce proactive pay equity legislation to make sure that women and men in federally regulated sectors will receive equal pay for equal work, because this government understands what I fundamentally believe: only when women realize their full potential can our economy and society be truly successful. Therefore, to the women in the workforce tired of coming up against obstacles they should not have to face, we hear them, we support them, and we will help them succeed.

We are also building on the innovation and skills plan that this government announced last year and transforming federal innovation programs to better support Canadian business innovators. Four flagship platforms will help businesses access innovation programs by cutting red tape and streamlining processes for entrepreneurs. The enhanced industrial research assistance program, IRAP, will support the development of projects of up to \$10 million, while a more focused strategic innovation fund will now support projects over \$10 million. The expanded Canadian trade commissioner service will help Canadian businesses access new opportunities in markets around the world.

•(1715)

[*Translation*]

This government recognizes that when small businesses succeed, the Canadian economy succeeds.

[*English*]

That is why we have continued to support small businesses by following through on our promise to lower the small business tax rate to 9%, saving these businesses up to \$7,500 a year.

These measures have a direct impact on communities like Markham. From family businesses like Chauhan's India Grill House to innovative tech entrepreneurs like Peytec, one of the many companies in Markham's own venture lab, budget 2018 would ensure that Markham continues to be the hub for innovation and Canada's high-tech capital.

To the small family businesses looking to expand or the mid-sized firms looking to scale, their businesses are important to this country, and we will help them grow. However, we cannot innovate economically if we do not support the research that makes innovation possible.

[*Translation*]

From open-heart surgery to the discovery of insulin, Canadian research benefits not just Canadians, but the whole world.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Canada must continue to be a global leader in research and innovation. That is why in budget 2018 we are proposing the single largest investment in fundamental research in Canadian history. This will total over \$3 billion in funding over five years. Of this, \$1.7 billion will support Canada's granting councils and research institutes, impacting about 21,000 students and researchers. We are also investing \$1.3 billion in lab infrastructure that Canadians use every day.

Pond Technologies Inc. is an example of what can happen when research meets entrepreneurship. The company's research has developed a technology that can burn CO₂ from any source into valuable bio-products, which can solve such global sustainability issues as climate change and food shortages. Pond Technologies began as an idea, was fostered through research, and has grown now into a company that is creating jobs in Markham.

For students and researchers at institutions like Seneca College or York University, whose new campus will be in Markham, this means more support to continue their work on the leading edge of tomorrow's biggest discoveries. From graduate students working in the lab, to early career researchers establishing a path, to pioneers at all levels of research and academia, this government believes in their potential and supports their work.

[Translation]

The broad themes of budget 2018 are equality and growth.

[English]

Not a single Canadian should be left behind in that progress, which is why budget 2018 would ensure support for all facets of Canadian society, youth, seniors, and diverse cultural communities included.

The government is enhancing our youth employment strategy through an investment of \$448 million over five years to help young Canadians gain valuable skills, work experience, and job opportunities.

Budget 2018 proposes \$23 million to support multiculturalism programs and a national anti-racism strategy, an investment that would also address discrimination targeted toward indigenous people.

The community of Markham—Thornhill thrives not in spite of its diversity but because of it. The Markham African Caribbean Canadian Association, the Federation of Chinese Canadians in Markham, and many others in our community are the kinds of organizations that can act as examples for the government as it works to increase inclusion. To the people who feel that they do not belong, we see the strength of their diversity, and we will help them thrive.

In order to build on our past innovations for future growth, it is fundamental to support middle-class families so that every individual has the opportunity to succeed. We introduced the Canada child benefit in 2016, and last fall we committed to indexing the CCB to keep up with the cost of living. This will ensure that nearly six million children currently benefiting from the CCB will continue to be supported.

Budget 2018 introduced the Canada workers benefit, which would help an estimated 300,000 additional workers and would help lift 70,000 Canadians out of poverty. We are working hard for the middle class and those working hard to join it.

Budget 2018 is an opportunity. It is an opportunity to ensure that every Canadian has a real and fair chance at success. For women building a business or career, this budget is for them. For researchers working on their next great discovery, this budget is for them. For entrepreneurs with a brilliant idea, this budget is for them. For middle-class workers supporting their families, this budget is for them.

That is why I am proud to support budget 2018.

• (1720)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to share with the member from Markham my experience on the special committee for pay equity to let her know that not one single expert witness said that the government would need 18 months to implement pay equity legislation. We are coming up to two years. The hon. member made a comment that pay equity legislation is coming. There is no money in this budget to implement pay equity legislation. When will the government implement pay equity legislation? Women are waiting, and I feel that they have been waiting much longer than they need to.

Ms. Mary Ng: Mr. Speaker, I would agree that women are waiting, and waiting too long. That is why I am so proud that in budget 2018, we will put forward progressive legislation that will bring pay equity to women who deserve it. We said earlier in the House that the commitment was there. Everyone on all sides agrees that pay equity legislation is important. I think that is supported across the way.

I am very proud that our government will be introducing this. I look forward to equal pay for equal work for women and men in our federal sectors.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sadly, 70% of Canadians who are in the last days of their life do not have access to palliative, end-of-life care. It was a decision of this Parliament to make that a priority so that 100% of Canadians who needed palliative care would have access to it. Funding for that was in the 2016 budget and in the 2017 budget. However, this year's budget does not mention it. Palliative care appears to be gone.

Why would the member support a budget that now neglects the needs of Canadians in the last days of their life? Why are the Liberals abandoning the goal of providing palliative care to every Canadian who needs it?

My other question for the member is this. Why is the funding for seniors being very selective? Only in one Liberal riding is there a research project. In fact, the largest concentration of seniors in Canada is in the west. Why would the west be ignored again? The Liberal government seems to have a habit of ignoring the west.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Mary Ng: Mr. Speaker, speaking of the west, I am proud the government has reached health accords with all provinces. In those health accords will be a delivery of health care services and seniors care for our senior population across the country. I am also proud of the investments we have made in home care, which will support seniors.

The budget is a further step with further investments to investments we have already made in support of our seniors. Our government has acted and has the track record of supporting seniors in all communities across the country.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's intervention, but she did not answer the question on pay equity. When the government came to power, in the first months after that it said that we should not to worry, that nothing had been cast in stone on democratic reform, that it was coming. On pharmacare, the Liberals have been saying this for now over 20 years. On pay equity, for it to be in the budget and not in the budget implementation act is a betrayal of the work that so many activists have undertaken for decades to achieve pay equity in our country.

Therefore, I would like the member to answer the question from the member for Saskatoon West. Is she is disappointed by the betrayal of Canadian women on pay equity?

• (1725)

Ms. Mary Ng: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. I am proud of budget 2018 because it is a budget for women. I talked about investments for our women entrepreneurs, about gender equality, and about investments for women. We have put together a gender statement in the budget, and this is what will happen going forward.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe my time is going to be limited today, but I am pleased to rise today to speak to the budget implementation act.

Typically, when we are debating budget implementation bills, we are actually debating a true fiscal plan, a plan that sets out the proposed spending of the government to help the Canadian economy.

Through its budget and its implementation bill, it is clear to many Canadians that the government has no true coherent plan for the economy. The so-called budget that was announced by the government earlier this year was full of empty promises and very short on substance. The only true substantive part of the bill is the implementation of the Liberal carbon tax, which will raise the price of gas by 11¢ per litre for Canadian consumers.

I represent a rural riding in central southwestern Ontario. Driving to work, to the grocery store, and to the hockey rink is the only option. It is very similar to your riding, Mr. Speaker, so you know what I am talking about. Residents in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound do not want any form of carbon tax, whether it is from Kathleen Wynne or from this government.

Another concern that has been expressed by a number of constituents in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound is the complete lack of new initiatives for agriculture and Canadian farmers. It is shameful that the government in its last budget implementation bill was able to find \$480 million for the Asian Infrastructure Investment

Bank to fund projects outside the country, while Canadian farmers were left behind. People in my riding, including myself, still shake our heads over that. It is not fair, and it is wrong.

The truly disappointing, though not surprising, that part of the government's most recent budget is the continued commitment to further debt and deficits. As a fiscal conservative, it is infuriating to see the government come out year after year, since 2015, and present us with budgets that commit to deficits.

In the election, the Prime Minister promised modest deficits of \$10 billion per year for two years, with a pledge that we would return to balanced budgets by 2019. Last year, the deficit was \$19.4 billion. This year, the government is projecting a deficit of \$18.1 billion. There is absolutely no plan in place for Canada to return to balanced budgets. In fact, the Department of Finance has projected that we will not be able to balance the books until the year 2045.

I have four grandchildren, but my oldest one just turned 13 less than a month ago. Because of the government's economic mismanagement, she will be 40 years old by the time Canada is able to return to balanced budgets. I cannot run my household or business like that. Neither can anyone else. However, it seems the government can.

I look forward to finishing my speech whenever that time comes up.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have six and a half minutes remaining in his time for his speech and the usual five minutes for questions and comments when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

The House resumed from February 28 consideration of the motion that Bill S-210, An Act to amend An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill S-210.

First of all, as the members of the House already know, the NDP will be supporting this bill. We want to thank the senator who raised this matter in the other place, as well as the member who raised it in this House.

Private Members' Business

The reason we are supporting this bill is very simple. We do not believe, nor have we ever believed, that the government should play with words when it comes to legislation. We thought it was important to have fair titles. We thought it was important that the government be reasonable, that it not seek to divide Canadians. Instead, the government should be promoting consensus on legislation.

[English]

The first reason we are supporting this bill is that we have always opposed the former Conservative government under Mr. Harper in his intent to try to deform legislation, to add titles that are absolutely inappropriate. We fought this through the years of the Harper government. There were many times that we raised the fact that the government was imposing titles that made no sense and were designed for political purposes, rather to properly reflect the content of the legislation before the House of Commons.

The issue raised by the title of one government bill, the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, was very problematic, as were a number of other titles. A government should be looking for consensus in this country, not searching for division and imposing on acts and bills and legislation titles that are designed for political purposes.

Certainly the Conservative government had the opportunity to campaign, but that was not appropriate for legislation that comes before the House and is considered by all of the members of Parliament who are elected to represent their districts. The use by the former Harper Conservatives of these kinds of titles never should have happened. We certainly agree with eliminating the title in this case.

I raised earlier this week the very many practices that the Harper Conservatives brought in that the current Liberal government is continuing. It includes omnibus legislation, the most bloated omnibus legislation in Canada's history. There are 556 pages in the budget implementation act that we just suspended debate on, and there are so many other cases where we see the lack of transparency and the lack of respect for democratic institutions under the Harper government transformed into the new Liberal government. It is completely contrary to what Liberals committed to.

In this case at least, we are seeing the initiative of one member of Parliament in speaking out against a Harper Conservative practice. At least one Liberal is speaking out against the current government continuing this practice, at least in this case, so we thank him for that.

At the same time, since I represent my riding, I need to talk about respect for diversity in this country and the fact that the Harper Conservatives, in introducing that divisive title, were not showing respect for the diversity of this land that we all call home.

In the riding of New Westminster—Burnaby, there is more diversity within a few square kilometres of that riding than exists anywhere else in Canada and, we believe, anywhere else on the planet. Within a few square kilometres of the city of New Westminster, south Burnaby, east Burnaby, and Cariboo Hill, in the Burnaby-Edmonds area, over 150 languages are spoken. All major centres of faith are found in the riding of New Westminster—

Burnaby. I am so honoured to represent that area. Through the course of a day, sometimes I will be able to use fragments of 14 or 15 different languages with the various groups that are so active in the cultural diversity that is New Westminster—Burnaby.

• (1735)

It is an exciting place. There are so many festivals. What we have is Canadians of so many different origins, from the four corners of this planet, coming together in consensus and making sure that they work together and bring the best of their countries of origin.

My grandfather and grandmother on my mother's side did the same when they came from Norway, as did my grandfather and grandmother on my father's side when they came from Ireland and England. They brought to New Westminster—Burnaby a lot of diversity and traditions that were important, and all in keeping with those fundamental values of human rights and equality that Canadians believe in. In New Westminster—Burnaby we find that writ large, 150 times over. People from all corners of the earth come together in harmony.

I can recall one incident that exhibits the kind of acceptance and the kind of tolerance of each other that really underscores Canadian values. I go to the Chariot Festival every year at the Tamil-speaking Hindu temple on Edmonds Street in Burnaby. It is a loud, boisterous, and celebratory festival. People go through the streets of the community around Edmonds. There is loud music, which is wonderful. It is vibrant. There is dancing.

The first time I accompanied the marchers through the neighbourhood, I went up to some burly guys who were sitting at the side of their fence drinking a cold beer. It was a hot summer day. I asked them how they felt about all this. I was not sure what the reaction of the gentlemen would be, but one of them said to me that he loved it, because he did not have to travel around the world to see the traditions in Tamil-speaking India, because India comes to his door.

That type of acceptance and admiration of the diversity and multiculturalism that exists in New Westminster—Burnaby is something I believe all Canadians share. That is the hallmark of Canadian multiculturalism, and I see it each and every day in my riding. I see an acceptance and a willingness to look at what is best that has been brought from the four corners of the earth and woven into the tapestry that is the multicultural nation we call home, with the various origins, including, of course, first nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

More often than not, we get that balance right. We still have so much to do to make sure that every Canadian feels accepted and welcome. We still have a lot of work to do in that respect. My colleagues in the NDP raise this every day in the House of Commons. Generally, most Canadian communities get it right, and most Canadian communities believe in that acceptance of each other. That is a good start for Canada.

That is why, getting back to Bill S-210, the idea of carving off what was an extraordinarily divisive title, used for political purposes, is an important but small step in what we want to achieve as a country.

We should all believe, as the 150 different languages spoken in my riding attest, that Canadians do best when we all work together and accept the best of each one of us. As a country, we do best when we are willing to listen to each other and learn from each other and build that into the immense multicultural tapestry we call Canada.

New Westminster—Burnaby perhaps is a bit of a hallmark for the rest of the country, with 150 languages and all major religions found within it. I would like to think that is how we all want to see Canada. I would like to think that we all believe in the acceptance of each other and that we all believe in not promoting division but rather in promoting unity and working together, regardless of our diverse countries of origin and creed. On behalf of my party, I would like to say that we support this legislation as a small step in that direction.

● (1740)

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise and speak in support of Bill S-210.

Bill S-210 proposes to repeal the short title of Bill S-7, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other acts, which received royal assent on June 18, 2015. The short title found in section 1 of Bill S-7, is the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act. It must be noted that it is this title, not the substance of that piece of legislation, that is the subject of the bill we are currently debating.

As hon. members are probably aware, the act we are proposing to amend sought to strengthen measures that prevent things like early and forced marriage, and to better protect women and girls in Canada. However, I wish to note that during the process Parliament took to review Bill S-7, there was considerable criticism of the bill's short title from stakeholders, senators, members of Parliament, committee witnesses, and the media. These groups opposed the title, emphasizing it had the potential to build divisions in Canadian society by targeting certain communities.

In the view of the government, the use of the word “barbaric” in the short title of Bill S-7 is inflammatory and potentially divisive. It has the potential to breed fear of certain groups of immigrants, and in doing so, it distracts from the key goal of the legislation, which is to help protect women of all cultural backgrounds. Stakeholders have also noted that the title of the bill needs to be more neutral and that it should reflect the content of the bill rather than using such emotionally charged terms like “barbaric”. It is particularly harmful to deliberately link the terms “barbaric” and “cultural”.

Let me be clear. Violence against women takes many different forms and affects millions of women and girls in Canada and around the world regardless of religion, nationality, or culture. In her presentation to parliamentarians, Avvy Go, the director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, argued that the title could invoke racist stereotypes. She added that it could detract from Canadians having a real and honest discussion about domestic violence and from seeing domestic violence for what it really is, namely, an issue of gender inequality and not an issue of cultural identity.

Allow me to note some other comments. Lawyer Chantal Desloges stated that the short title deters citizens from engaging in meaningful discussion of the bill's actual content. Dr. Rupaleem

Private Members' Business

Bhuyan, a professor in the University of Toronto's faculty of social work, told committee members that the title was misleading from the serious issues that this bill seeks to address.

Finally, representatives from the Canadian Bar Association and the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants raised concerns about the divisiveness of the short title.

As we see from these examples, this title has prompted considerable concern from many individuals and organizations. This is partly why the government supports Bill S-210 to repeal the short title of Bill S-7. Repealing this title is a symbolic step, but one that carries real meaning and consequence because, as we all know, language matters.

I would propose to hon. members that for one culture to consider itself morally superior over another serves only to divide our world. It fosters sentiments of xenophobia and is destructive, especially in our increasingly globalized world. Our responsibility as elected members is not to perpetuate misguided ideas or divisive language that could shape Canadian society.

The government's support for Bill S-210 demonstrates our commitment to openness, acceptance, and generosity in the Canadian immigration process. It reflects our commitment to accuracy and to avoiding language that is misleading, inflammatory, and divisive. Finally, it reflects our commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals in Canada, especially women and children.

Diversity is at the heart of our success as a nation and of what we offer the world. We are deeply committed to promoting inclusion and acceptance, which are some of the key pillars of Canadian society. The success of the diverse newcomers who migrate to Canada supports our success as a strong and united country.

● (1745)

We must ensure that our words, especially the words we use to describe our laws, reflect the openness that is the cornerstone of Canada's place in the world. This bill, if passed by Parliament, would remove the short title of Bill S-7, the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, that was adopted during the last parliamentary session. This is the bill's only provision and does not propose to make any other changes adopted through the passage of Bill S-7.

In summary, the government's support for Bill S-210 would remove the short title of the current legislation, a title that can promote division and intolerance and that can also be seen as targeting specific communities. On that basis, the government supports Bill S-210. I would encourage my honourable colleagues to support this bill to foster an open, tolerant, and inclusive Canada. Diversity is our strength. We know that Canada has succeeded culturally, politically, and economically because of our diversity, not in spite of it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City has right of reply for five minutes.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to rise today to close the second hour of debate at second reading on Bill S-210, an act to amend an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

The purpose of Bill S-210 is simple and straightforward. It would repeal the short title of Bill S-7, the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, which was passed into law in the previous Parliament.

As I stated in the first hour of debate, there is no place for this language in legislation. It is inappropriate to associate culture with barbaric practices. This was reflected in testimony on Bill S-7 at committee, where numerous stakeholder groups objected to the inclusion of the word “culture” in the bill's short title. Senator Mobina Jaffer brought forward Bill S-210 to fix this.

The former minister of immigration, refugees, and citizenship, the hon. John McCallum, who was the Liberal immigration critic in the previous Parliament, also raised our party's objections to the inclusion of the word “culture”. Senator Salma Ataullahjan, the original sponsor of Bill S-7, has also indicated her support for the removal of the short title.

In her remarks on Bill S-210, my colleague from Vancouver East put the importance of this legislation in clear terms: words matter. The words we use, especially in this place and in the laws we pass, have consequences. Words reflect the values and ideas we present to the country and to the world. Suggesting that barbaric practices are associated with particular cultures only serves to divide Canadians and fails to communicate constructively to an open and tolerant society.

Canada prides itself on being a multicultural, inclusive society. Diversity is our strength. We know that Canada has succeeded culturally, politically, and economically because of our diversity, not in spite of it. It is important that we exercise care and thoughtfulness in the legislation we put forward. The short title of Bill S-7 is a blatant example of the previous government's attempts to divide Canadians, while doing nothing to advance the substance of the legislation.

I have been fortunate enough to sponsor two private member's bills, Bill C-374 and Bill S-210, which is before us today. I took great care in deciding what pieces of legislation I wanted to advance and sincerely believe in the importance of this legislation.

Language matters, and it is incumbent upon us as legislators to take the utmost care in the words we use. During Bill S-210's first hour of debate, I was disappointed to hear the member for Edmonton West refer to this bill as a waste of time. I find it unfortunate that Conservatives fail to understand this. They continue to demonstrate that they are out of touch with Canadians and would rather divide than unite.

I have the honour to represent a diverse riding that is home to Christians and Sikhs, Buddhists and Muslims, first nations and newcomers. This weekend I will have the pleasure of participating in the city of Surrey's Vaisakhi Day Parade, which is the largest of its kind in Canada. Hundreds of thousands of people are expected to

participate in this year's festival, an important celebration of Sikhs in our communities. The Vaisakhi Day Parade is a proud display of our region's rich cultural tapestry and a demonstration of the diversity we celebrate as Canadians.

Unnecessarily conflating abhorrent and illegal practices with particular cultures is not a productive way in which to recognize and promote Canadian diversity. We do a disservice to our multicultural communities when we grossly misuse language, as was the case with Bill S-7's short title. Bill S-210 presents an opportunity for us to correct this flaw, and I ask all my colleagues to join me in supporting this important piece of legislation.

• (1750)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 18, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, on November 27, I rose in the House to ask a question about employment insurance sickness benefits.

Currently, workers who fall ill are entitled to 15 weeks of employment insurance benefits. As I pointed out during my intervention on November 27, 15 weeks is not enough, especially for someone with serious health problems.

Adjournment Proceedings

More than one-third of claimants need far more than the 15 weeks granted by this program. In late 2016, the Prime Minister himself and the minister said that they would extend the benefits period. However, a year and a half later, nothing has changed. That is unacceptable. It is high time that the government kept its promise to make this change, which so many of our constituents have been calling for.

I want to acknowledge Marie-Hélène Dubé, from Rivière-du-Loup. In 2009, while battling cancer, she started a petition calling for the government at the time to extend EI sickness benefits. Nearly 600,000 signatures were collected. Almost a decade later, Marie-Hélène Dubé's fight to allow sick workers to recover with dignity continues.

I want to thank everyone in Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale who wrote to me recently about extending the EI sickness benefit period.

The 15-week EI sickness benefit provision goes back to 1971 and is completely out of touch with the realities of today's society. We need to take action now. Last year, 345,000 Canadian workers needed these emergency benefits.

The Liberal government promised to extend EI sickness benefits a year and a half ago, but workers who are forced to take time off for health reasons are still not entitled to more than 15 weeks of benefits. This situation makes life very difficult for thousands of patients who cannot go back to work when their benefits run out.

Recently, Christine Roussel, a single mother in Quebec City who was diagnosed with breast cancer, had to take sick leave in the winter of 2017 to undergo chemotherapy. Even though she was earning less on EI, those benefits helped her make ends meet. Things started going downhill on June 24, 2017, which is when her sickness benefits suddenly ended. Without disability insurance, the mother of two had to turn to social assistance. Unable to survive on welfare, the Quebec City resident had to start working again on December 22 even though she was not healthy enough to do so. I cannot believe the government forces sick people back to work instead of taking care of them. We have to do something.

During the last campaign, the NDP promised to extend those benefits and make them more accessible so that sick workers would not end up like Ms. Dubé and Ms. Roussel.

The Prime Minister and the minister promised to take action, so my question again is this: what are they waiting for?

• (1755)

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for requesting this debate today. As members know, the topic of this debate, the employment insurance sickness benefit, is of utmost importance to our government.

Since taking office, we have introduced changes to the EI system to make it more flexible, and to make sure that EI aligns with both the needs of Canadian families and the realities of today's labour market. In particular, EI sickness benefits are an important support measure for Canadians who have to leave their job due to injury, sickness, or quarantine. They provide temporary financial assistance

to eligible people who are unable to work, so they can restore their health before returning to work.

In 2015-16, the EI program received more than 365,000 sickness benefit claims, and paid out over \$1.5 billion for this type of benefit. On average, recipients claimed 10 weeks of benefits of the maximum entitlement of 15 weeks. This shows that, in the majority of cases, the available coverage is sufficient. We are well aware that sometimes recipients use up their 15 weeks of benefits before they are able to return to work. We are keeping a close eye on this situation.

Sickness benefits are just one part of a range of support measures for Canadians living with long-term sickness or disability. This also includes Canada pension plan disability benefits, benefits paid by private insurance programs, and support programs implemented by provinces and territories. Our government is also constantly working to improve the EI program.

As I noted earlier, we have enacted and implemented several changes to ensure that the EI system is more adaptable, fairer, and more flexible, and that it continues to support Canadians when they need it most. On December 3, for example, changes to EI special benefits came into effect. They highlighted our government's support for caregivers by making EI benefits more flexible, more inclusive, and more accessible.

First, we created a new EI family caregiver benefit for adults. This provides up to 15 weeks of benefits to eligible caregivers to offer support to an adult family member who is critically ill or injured. In addition to specialist physicians, general practitioners and nurse practitioners can now sign documents attesting that the child or adult is critically ill. This change also applies to compassionate care benefits for providing end-of-life care for family members.

Once again, our government is committed to making sure that Canada's EI system is flexible enough to meet the needs of modern-day families, because we understand that this is the best way to help Canadians when they need it the most.

Adjournment Proceedings

● (1800)

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Madam Speaker, I put myself in the shoes of those who are in this situation and who hear the government talk about averages and reviewing the situation. These people are hearing that they are among the minority in claiming the 15 weeks of benefits. Then, the government changes topics and goes on to speak more generally. The difficult circumstances these people are in do not get any better.

This is disheartening, because the Prime Minister said that he would do something. He said this on the *Téléjournal*, in Montreal, as did the minister. The government needs to stop sticking its head in the sand and fulfill its promises. I will ask my question one last time for all those who are facing financial difficulties instead of fighting their illnesses.

On behalf of all of my constituents, when will this government fulfill its commitment to review the EI sickness benefits system?

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khara: Madam Speaker, our government strongly believes that the employment insurance program plays a crucial role in ensuring a decent income for families living in these particularly difficult circumstances.

We have implemented several concrete measures to make the employment insurance program even more flexible and generous for those who need it. However, we are not going to stop there. We are going to continue to improve the lives of workers who have faced these kinds of tragedies. As the minister recently said in the House, our work has only begun.

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, adjournment debates allow us to return to an answer that may not have been entirely satisfactory. Last November, I asked a question related to the victims caught in a grey area, which I will have an opportunity to explain. In response, the Minister of International Trade spouted rhetoric. People will say that it may not be unusual for the Minister of International Trade to spout rhetoric, but I was particularly disappointed that this minister, who lives in the Mauricie region and is very familiar with the issue, evaded my question rather than finding a solution to help the victims.

What are we talking about when we say that people are caught in a grey area when it comes to pyrrhotite? We have spoken quite a lot about this matter. I caution the person who is going to trot out the answer this evening. I do not want to hear about \$30 million having been allocated. We know this, as do the victims in Trois-Rivières, especially all those who cannot access this money, which is woefully inadequate to meet their needs.

In any case, this is not really the issue. The people caught in the grey area are the owners of homes with concrete that has a pyrrhotite content between 0% and 0.23%, the benchmark cited in the first ruling made public. However, this benchmark, as the judge mentioned, is not a scientifically proven standard. It is a benchmark

that he cited based on the examples he studied in this first wave of court cases.

However, none of the victims caught in this grey area qualify for financial assistance. They are not eligible for any of the \$30 million the Liberals keep talking about, because the percentage of pyrrhotite in their homes is under 0.23%, even though we already know that some of them are having problems with pyrrhotite in their foundations anyway. As for those who have not seen any problems yet, their homes are a total write-off. No one would buy a house riddled with pyrrhotite.

The only way to save these people from the grey area is for the federal government to establish a quality standard for concrete aggregates, based on a scientific study. Below a certain percentage, the homeowner could be certain of having no problems, and the home would regain its full value.

How can it be that in 2018, the year when the government has agreed to review the building code standards, no study is being conducted to establish a scientific standard on pyrrhotite in order to rescue all the victims from the awkward grey area that is making it impossible for them to sell their homes?

When is the government going to fund a study on the quality of concrete aggregates that will let the victims in the grey area move on?

● (1805)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to respond to the comments made earlier today by the member for Trois-Rivières regarding the national building code and pyrrhotite. Today we are going to talk about the grey area he was referring to regarding pyrrhotite content and concrete components. My colleague across the aisle will be happy with the following answers.

As the hon. opposition member knows, the health and safety of Canadians is absolutely a priority for this government. We are aware that the pyrrhotite deteriorating the concrete used in home foundations is causing major problems in Mauricie, Quebec. A member from this side lives in this region and has given us an overview of the problem. This mineral swells when it is exposed to water, which has led to significant, costly damages and is causing many problems for families.

This is why our government, the Government of Canada, and the Government of Quebec have signed an agreement to help those affected. I am proud to say that this assistance includes a federal investment of \$30 million in the previous budget. The member opposite does not want to hear this amount, because there was nothing allocated when I assumed this position. We have allocated \$10 million a year. The member opposite claims that this is nothing, but as we can see when we crunch the numbers, this amount can cover hundreds of houses. The investments started in 2016-17 to help owners affected by pyrrhotite in the concrete. Whether or not he wants to hear it, the figures speak for themselves, and these are the figures in our budget.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let us now talk about the federal government's role as it pertains to building codes. It involves dealing with the grey area and supporting the independent Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes to develop a series of national model codes every five years, including the national building code, the national plumbing code, the national fire code, and the national energy code for buildings.

I had the opportunity to interpret those codes for over 35 years as part of my career. I can say this is massive undertaking, that these organizations can develop national model codes based on major public consultation. In fact, the Canadian code-writing process has one of the most extensive public review procedures in the world. This ensures that the codes are responsive to the needs of Canadians and incorporate a broad range of important considerations. Who are we as MPs to decide on an appropriate level? We put our trust in the professionals. They are the ones who will decide. The organizations are in place and they are the ones who will find solutions. They will take into account technologies, materials, innovation, construction practices, and research to establish acceptable levels. This process has resulted in Canada having one of the best standards of construction in the world. I am proud of Canada's national building code, which makes it possible to achieve a high degree of uniformity in building construction.

On the specific issue of pyrrhotite, the National Model Building Codes published in 2005, 2010 and 2015 do reference the Canadian Standards Association, or CSA, standard that prohibits the use of expansive aggregates such as pyrrhotite in concrete. There are other products, but pyrrhotite is one. The NRC continues to work with stakeholders on developing a research project, which is what people wanted to hear I am told, to inform the development of a standard for pyrrhotite in concrete. The NRC is coordinating its efforts and working with partners, including universities, cement and concrete associations, the CSA, and government partners. We expect the results of this work to inform the interim update of the National Model Building Code planned for 2022. The CSA is currently considering updates to this standard. It is anticipated that the next edition of the National Model Building Code, which will be released in 2020, and all subsequent updates, will take into consideration the standard on pyrrhotite, as well as justify said standard.

•(1810)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. We have already said thanks for the \$30 million; we are not going to say it 50 million times. Carrying out its responsibilities is the very least a government should be expected to do.

I never suggested members of Parliament should be the ones writing the new standards, but just as my colleague said, the CSA will take research results into account. The problem is that there is no research because there is no funding for research. Only specialized labs and university labs like the one at Laval University can produce the kind of definitive answers that the CSA would take into account. The last time it looked at this, it said there was no new information that justified making a change. If there is no research, there will be no new information next time either.

When will the government fund a scientific study?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I know my colleague had a minute to reply and that he kept talking about the \$30 million to run down the clock. We have actually discussed a partnership with the university. We also talked about putting our organizations to work on this issue to improve the national building code. We have also worked on policies based on important facts. We have this file well in hand. Today I am proud to say that our government has taken substantive action on this file. Nothing could have been done better than what we have done so far.

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to again talk about a question that came up last November.

In November, I had asked the Minister of National Revenue about her mandate to provide a more client-focused Canada Revenue Agency. I pointed out then that under her watch, her department had reversed or changed the policy on type 1 diabetics to deny the tax credit to many Canadians who had qualified for many years.

I raised a number of issues, including the sort of half-baked plans the department had to tax retail and restaurant workers. I mentioned the busy signals or hang-ups at the call centre. However, the main part of my question then was in reaction to a growing number of accounts that we had heard. Some were raised by my colleague, the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, about targeting single parents, telling them they had not supplied sufficient evidence, or they were in fact separated or divorced, causing all kinds of consternation for some folks about having to obtain, sometimes at great expense, separation agreements, which were then still rejected as evidence of separation for tax purposes. The response I had to that question was wholly inadequate, hence why we are revisiting it tonight.

The minister talked about the intention of having a client-focused Canada Revenue Agency and being instructed through a mandate letter to do so. She talked about how the agency did not really try to hurt anybody, suggesting that anybody who was having problems providing the documents required should contact the CRA for help.

I thought that was a particularly ironic response, given that we were already seized with the matter of the call centre debacle, where almost two-thirds of the people who did call the centre for help were simply hung up on. Of those who actually did get through, 30% of the people were given wrong information. Being given wrong information is probably worse. It makes taxpayers worse off than they were before they made the phone call. They think they have been told something that will affect their course of action with compliance, but they are in fact wrong. They may have been better off having not called at all.

Therefore, it is really not an adequate response to say that people should call the CRA and it will help them out. We already know from the Auditor General's report the sort of futility that surrounds that.

Adjournment Proceedings

I can imagine we may hear tonight more blaming of the previous government, saying the Liberals inherited a situation that was so bad that there was nothing they could do to fix it. However, it has been two and half years. There is a certain point at which they have to own their track record. The deterioration of the service that many tax preparers are reporting to me have been accelerating in the last couple of years.

Notwithstanding that, I am certain the previous government did not get everything right and not everything went perfectly. However, this is not a race to the bottom to see who can deliver the worst service to Canadians.

Canadians need answers and they need a plan to deliver a truly client or taxpayer-focused Canada Revenue Agency.

● (1815)

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House tonight and speak about the service improvements that our government has brought forward and will continue to bring forward to the Canada Revenue Agency.

I would like to note the important role the CRA plays in distributing the benefits on which Canadians rely. I am happy my colleague brought up the Canada child benefit, one of the most important policies our government has put in place, raising hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. In the 2016-17 benefit year, in my colleague's riding of Calgary Rocky Ridge alone, we supported over 24,000 children with payments totalling over \$67 million. That is almost 25,000 children in his own riding whom the member opposite chose not to support when he voted against this historic measure.

Let us now talk about some of the important service improvements we have made at the CRA to ensure that families across our country have access to important credits and benefits, such as the Canada child benefit.

Through our historic investments in the community volunteer income tax program, we help to support community organizations hosting free tax clinics for eligible individuals. I am proud to tell members that last year, through the CVITP, approximately 17,000 volunteers helped file approximately 768,000 tax returns all across Canada. This year we expect to surpass those numbers.

With more and more Canadians filing their taxes online, improved digital services are more important than ever before. Last year, nearly 90% of the 25 million returns filed were completed online. This is why we have improved and implemented programs such as the "Auto-fill my return" and ReFILE. The express notice of assessment service is now available in certified tax software and allows Canadians to receive and print their notice of assessment right after filing.

Despite a high number of Canadians who filed their taxes using digital services, it is also important to our government that we meet the needs of people who file their taxes using traditional methods. In February, Canadians who filed their individual income taxes using paper forms in previous years received a tax return package directly by mail.

File my Return, a new service introduced this year, lets eligible Canadians with low and fixed incomes whose situations remain unchanged from year to year file their income tax and benefits return through a dedicated automated phone service. Furthermore, to make tax payments more convenient for Canadians, people can now make their payment in person with cash or by debit card at Canada Post outlets. This new in-person payment service helps people living in remote and northern areas who may not live close to a bank or have easy access to Internet service.

We are extremely proud of the work that we have done, and we are committed to doing even more to make life easier for all Canadians.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, while I always listen to my colleague eagerly when we are having these discussions, at the beginning of her statement she said that she was going to tell us all about the service improvements at the CRA. She certainly had my attention there, and I thought I might hear about some substantial new service improvements that might have addressed some of the issues that I mentioned in my question.

I heard that the CRA is mailing paper tax returns to Canadians who filed by paper last year. No doubt that is convenient for those Canadians. Others had contacted, for example, my MP office, and they were put out that they had wanted to go and pick up one from somewhere and noted that they are not available to be picked up. Some people got their package mailed to them. That is great, and perhaps it is a service improvement. Some people can pay their taxes at a post office. That is a service improvement, perhaps.

What about the growing backlog of appeals and the growing volume—

● (1820)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is only one minute for rebuttal. I am sorry.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Madam Speaker, let me be absolutely clear. Canada Revenue Agency must treat all Canadians like valued clients, not simply as taxpayers, and not certainly like Conservatives did when they were in government.

Adjournment Proceedings

In just two years, we have made numerous improvements to ensure CRA better serves all Canadians. I thank my hon. colleague for raising this question because it gives me an opportunity to talk a bit about the service improvements that I just mentioned in my speech earlier. Even with the progress we made, we understand there remains significant work to be done, but we are committed to getting it done.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:21 p.m.)

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