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(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 10, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 10, 2018

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1405)

[*English*]

SASKATCHEWAN TRANSPORTATION COMPANY

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, 86 years ago this month, the parliamentary caucus of a new political party was formed. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation went on to adopt its policy manifesto in Regina. The CCF was a farmer-labour coalition.

A current issue that engages farm and labour interests is the elimination of the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. It provided good unionized jobs for bus operators as well as a needed service for rural communities.

In a member's statement a year ago, I warned that the rushed elimination of the STC violated the Canada Labour Code's notice provisions. Yesterday news broke that a federal arbitrator confirmed this violation and ordered the province to compensate its former employees. That is a good start, but I will continue to fight for Saskatchewan's fair share of federal transit funding to restore bus service between our communities.

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[*Translation*]

FRANCO-MANITOBAN WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Franco-Manitoban weekly paper, *La Liberté*, will be celebrating its 105th anniversary on May 20.

La Liberté is a national leader and has received many national prizes, including awards of excellence from the Association de la presse francophone and the Canadian Community Newspaper Awards, but where it really shines is in its community involvement.

Thanks to its partnership with the Franco-Manitoban school division and Collège Louis-Riel and its “Dans nos écoles” columns, we learn about a growing and inspiring future generation. Through its advertorials, we discover the vitality and diversity of our francophone organizations.

La Liberté tells our story, and its perspective is unique to our community. Our newspaper is not a French version of the daily news. It is a true reflection of the diversity and many perspectives present in our French-speaking community.

Happy birthday to *La Liberté*.

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[*English*]

COAL INDUSTRY IN ALBERTA

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, coal-fired electricity and coal mining have been a mainstay of many regional economies in Alberta over the last 60 years. Forestburg and Hanna, two important communities in my riding, are perfect examples. Sixty percent of Forestburg's economy is based on the coal industry, with many employed at either the Battle River mine or the power plant. Hanna's economy is tied to Sheerness, where 200-plus people work at the generating station or the mine.

The phasing out of these industries will have significant ramifications. It is imperative that the transition plan involve local workers and communities. Unfortunately, the Liberal government thinks otherwise, and that is why the newly announced just transition task force has only one in 11 members from affected Alberta communities, while there are five from Ontario.

We need local people to help solve local challenges. I implore the government to change the composition of this task force to include representatives from Hanna, Forestburg, and other affected areas in decisions that will impact their livelihood and the survival of their communities.

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NATIONAL NURSING WEEK

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and highlight National Nursing Week.

Statements by Members

In my community of London, Ontario, we are privileged to have a significant number of dedicated and talented health care professionals. Whether it is the London Health Sciences Centre, St. Joseph's Health Care, the Middlesex-London Health Unit, Victorian Order of Nurses, long-term care facilities, or any of the other locations where nurses work hard every day, we can rest assured that they will be there to provide care in our most vulnerable of moments.

To all nurses from coast to coast to coast, their work is truly appreciated. We are grateful that they are always present to provide world-class care as well as to advocate for the needs of their patients.

The profession has significantly evolved since the days of nursing pioneer Florence Nightingale. Therefore, I challenge all Canadians to learn more about the important work nurses undertake and the challenges of their ever-changing roles.

The nurses of London and Canada have my sincere appreciation and utmost respect. Our communities are better off because of their tireless work and dedication.

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[*Translation*]

CLAUDIE BRIAND

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are people who inspire us and make a real difference through their courage, their determination, and their tenacity.

After waging a battle like that of David against Goliath, Claudie Briand from Trois-Rivières has succeeded in having the eligibility criteria expanded for the compensation program for victims of thalidomide. The judge even wrote, "...the application is allowed, the decision by Crawford is set aside, and a declaration is granted that the policies...are unreasonable to the point of being egregious."

Thank you, Ms. Briand, for seeing this fight through to this positive outcome so that others may benefit from the changes that will soon be made. I supported you in my own small way, and now you have given me essential tools I can use to support other victims in Trois-Rivières and across Canada.

Ms. Briand, the people of Trois-Rivières and I look up to you in admiration. Please consider this public declaration a testament to the remarkable woman you are.

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MOTHER'S DAY

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, families across Canada will come together to celebrate Mother's Day. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, aunts, all those who play a mentorship role in the life of a child, and especially the mother of my children, Elin, as well as my own mother, Pam.

[*English*]

Everyone in the House makes a lot of money, some more than others, so there is no excuse to miss Mother's Day or to get some flowers or chocolates. If people need recommendations in the Ottawa area or the Montreal area, they can give me a call.

More importantly, and I hope this statement gathers wide support from the House on this Mother's Day, let us not only celebrate mothers but continue our work to give mothers the respect they deserve, to fight for the equality of women, and to provide all parents with the tools they need to support them in doing the most important job, raising the next generation of leaders.

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● (1410)

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a little less than 10 years ago, a whirlwind blew into the other place. My good friend and a great Canadian, Nancy Greene Raine was honoured to accept the offer of a Senate appointment and to start a new chapter in her life.

Nancy brought commitment, energy, dedication, and passion to this new role. These are the same distinct qualities that brought her success as an Olympian and as an entrepreneur. Nancy has clearly made her mark on Parliament Hill. Whether it was fighting to preserve iconic lighthouses on the west coast, spearheading a comprehensive health and fitness regime on the Hill, or looking for solutions to the obesity crisis among our youth, ministers, both Conservative and Liberal, learned that she was dogged in her determination to make a difference.

It is hard to believe that she is moving on to her next adventure, and I would ask the House to join me in thanking her for all she continues to give to Canada. We will miss her.

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MANITOBA DAY

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Saturday marks the 148th birthday of Canada's keystone province, Manitoba. Manitoba's geography is one of the most unusual and diverse in Canada, from the Arctic tundra near Churchill to the Spirit Sands of the Carberry Desert to vast prairies and beautiful boreal forests.

Our provincial treasure, Lake Winnipeg, is the world's tenth-largest freshwater lake. Home of the Winnipeg Jets, and the curling capital of the world, Manitoba is also proud to host the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the National Microbiology Laboratory.

Our prairie province, the birthplace of Louis Riel, is the homeland of the Métis nation and encompasses the traditional territories of over 60 first nations. Manitobans have a rich history of welcoming people from around the world, creating a vibrant multicultural mosaic that reflects the best of who we are as Canadians.

Statements by Members

On May 12, let us wish all Manitobans a very happy Manitoba Day.

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NOBELTON SENIOR PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a wonderful time of the year, and not only because it is spring and warmth has finally returned to one of the coldest capitals in the world. It is also the time that grade 8 students from across the country travel to Ottawa to experience Parliament in action and to explore the nation's capital.

I have talked to many of my colleagues on both sides of the House, and they have shared with me that welcoming students to the Hill, sharing their stories, and hopefully inspiring the next generation of leaders to one day seek a seat in the House, is the highlight of their day.

I would like to specifically welcome the grade 8 students from Nobleton Senior Public School, who are visiting Ottawa today. This week, Nobleton Senior is recognizing Mental Health Week, an initiative reminding students of the importance of a school-life balance. To the grade 8 class of Nobleton Senior, and to the classes visiting Parliament this year, welcome.

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SPRING FLOODS

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Chatham-Kent—Leamington has over 150 kilometres of shoreline. This April, that shoreline was struck by a severe spring storm. The heavy rain and high winds caused widespread flooding and accelerated the pre-existing erosion, putting many of my constituents at severe risk.

Over the past weeks, I have visited Pelee Island, Erie Shore Drive, Cotterie Park, and Pulley Road to better appreciate the scope and devastation first-hand. I was shocked to see how destructive a single storm could be. Three-tonne boulders were literally tossed about like stones. On Pelee Island, the dike road was exposed after the armour stone was pulled into the lake by the storm, exposing the roadbed completely to the elements. A breach would cause the centre of the island, which sits nine feet below current lake levels in some locations, to flood.

I have reached out to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities but as of yet have not been advised of any funding. My constituents have a hard time understanding how the government can spend \$6 million to build a temporary ice rink but has no money for their safety and the protection of their property.

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MOTHER'S DAY

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a recent trip to Halifax, I had the honour of visiting Pier 21, the same place where 60 years earlier my mother and her family first touched ground in Canada. At just 19 years old, Vincenza Amante arrived at Pier 21 after travelling some 6,000 kilometres by land and sea. My mother left behind the warm familiarities of southern Italy to start a new life in northern British Columbia.

[*Translation*]

Like many immigrants, my mother arrived here without any money and with little education, and she spoke neither English nor French.

● (1415)

[*English*]

Canada's social fabric has been woven by immigrants who, like my mother, came to Canada with a set of values to work hard and remember their heritage. I would like to thank my mother for her courage and sacrifices. With Mother's Day only a few days away, I wish her, my wife Rose, and all mothers a wonderful and well-deserved Mother's Day.

[*Member spoke in Italian*]

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RAMADAN

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 16, at the first sign of the crescent moon, our Muslim community will begin the month-long observance of Ramadan, marking the first revelation of the Quran to Muhammad.

During Ramadan, adults in good health fast from sunrise to sunset to redirect their thoughts away from the world and to the spirit. To maintain the spiritual reward for this, Muslims also turn away from false speech, refraining from insults and making malicious comments about people. Could it be that we could all benefit by observing Ramadan here in this place?

However, if that and fasting are a little too much to ask, there is something else. Ramadan is a time of generosity, and on that score, I would like to propose that all of us here be Muslim for a month by setting aside a dollar a day, or more, from May 16 to June 14, and to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, donate it all to the nearest food bank. Then we can truly say to each other, "*Ramadan mubarak*".

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ISRAEL

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 14, 1948, Israel became an independent nation-state. Born of war, its short history as a state is one of more challenges to its sovereignty than maybe any other in the same time frame. Facing opposition to their very existence, Israelis built a shining light of pluralism, democracy, and freedom in a hostile and conflict-torn region. There are not words strong enough to describe Israel's resilience. Canada's Conservatives stand with Israel under attack by Iran.

Israel's people are innovative and entrepreneurial, pioneers of technological advances that help millions every day. With countless achievements, from mathematics to medicine to cybersecurity, and small but crucial inventions taken for granted, such as the USB flash drive, the world is better because of Israel. Allies must not waver.

Oral Questions

At once a young nation-state and a people since the beginning of time, from Eilat to the Golan Heights, and Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, that high-tech and holy land always overcomes unimaginable adversity. Israel deserves independence, peace, prosperity, and freedom of belief forever.

Congratulations to Israel on 70 years of independence.

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[Translation]

MARGUERITE MENDELL

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on June 30, 2017, the Governor General of Canada announced new Order of Canada appointments. Among those was my friend Marguerite Mendell. Her appointment ceremony was this morning, and I wanted to mark the occasion by paying tribute to her.

[English]

A renowned economist and teacher at Concordia University, Professor Mendell shares her career and work between university research in the field of social economics and its practice by engaging with numerous community organizations.

[Translation]

While conventional wisdom considers the market economy the only model for profitability, Professor Mendell proposes a different model, the social economy, which strives to reconcile economic activity and social justice.

[English]

For her contributions to social and economic innovation and her research to develop innovative tools and policy levers to reduce poverty, Marguerite Mendell is a truly worthy recipient of the Order of Canada.

I congratulate Margie. *Brava.*

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia on May 17, and the urgent need to combat hatred and discrimination against the LGBTQ community here at home and around the world.

While Canadian law now guarantees equal rights for all LGBTQ2 Canadians, on the ground things are still quite different. Trans rights guaranteed in Bill C-16 still have not been fully implemented. The gay blood ban remains in place. Discrimination and violence remain all too common.

In 113 countries, members of my community have no legal protections from discrimination. In over 77 countries, we face lengthy prison sentences, violence, and even death because of who we are or who we love. Indonesia is now considering criminalizing the LGBTQ community, the largest rollback of gay rights in history.

Today I call on the government to speak up more forcefully on the world stage for the universal values of equality, inclusion, and respect. I call on all members of Parliament to work together toward

the elimination of all forms of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

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● (1420)

JUSTICE

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians elect MPs to represent their interests and concerns in the House of Commons. Among other things, Canadians elect us to prioritize their safety and security, to defend the vulnerable, and to create laws that put the rights of victims before those of criminals, which is why it is extremely alarming to those of us on this side of the House to see the Prime Minister pandering to criminals rather than protecting victims.

Bill C-75 reduces penalties for a long list of very serious crimes, including participating in a terrorist group, trafficking women and girls, committing violence against a clergy member, murdering a child within one year of birth, abducting a child, forced marriage, advocating for genocide, and participating in organized crime.

The Conservatives believe the safety of Canadians should be the number one priority of every government. We will continue to speak up and speak out for those who are affected. We believe that the values portrayed within Bill C-75 are both deceptive and damaging, and we will continue to advocate on behalf of Canadians.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Liberal government will always stand up for women's rights, regardless of what the Conservatives think or say.

Yesterday, in the House of Commons, the Conservative member for Provencher shouted that a woman's right to choose is not a right. Women and women alone have the right to choose what they do with their bodies. This is the foundation of gender equality.

It has been 30 years since the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed a woman's right to choose. It is time for the Conservative Party to recognize that right. Our government unequivocally supports women's rights to decide what to do with their bodies, and we are always going to stand up for that right.

Why will the Conservatives not stand up for the right to choose?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

MARIJUANA

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was reported yesterday that the government is prepared to legalize marijuana even though Bill C-46, the drug-impaired driving bill, has not been approved yet.

By going against the advice of experts, doctors, the provinces, and law enforcement, the Prime Minister is putting Canadians' safety at risk.

Oral Questions

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister. Can he assure Canadians that he is not going to give the go-ahead to legalize marijuana until all police officers in Canada are trained and equipped to combat the scourge of drug-impaired driving?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member for Provencher said yesterday that a woman's right to choose is not a right.

[*English*]

The Supreme Court upheld this right more than 30 years ago today.

These comments serve to take women's rights backward. Will the Leader of the Opposition please denounce the comments from his caucus and clearly voice his support right now for a woman's right to choose?

[*Translation*]

Will the Leader of the Opposition denounce the comments from his caucus and support a woman's right to choose?

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the comments from my side were made outside the House. I am going to stick to question period, because that is the opposition's role.

The facts are clear. After legalization, fatal accidents caused by drivers who had used marijuana doubled in Washington State and tripled in Colorado. This is an extremely important issue that we need to discuss here in the House. We are talking about human lives here.

Can the Prime Minister promise that legalization will not proceed until all police officers in Canada are equipped and trained to combat this scourge?

[*English*]

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clearly disappointing that the party opposite still believes that women's rights are not human rights. Yesterday, disbelief was on full display when the member for Provencher claimed that a woman's right to choose is not a right.

Will the member opposite please stand up for women everywhere and make it clear that a woman's right to choose is clearly a right?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to read a quote from a Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police report. "A primary concern of policing in Canada is impaired driving. This is an issue today. It will become an even greater issue with [the potential upcoming] legalization."

I repeat my question for the third time, and I hope that the Prime Minister will be brave enough to rise and answer. Can he assure that police officers across Canada will be trained and equipped to combat the scourge—

•(1425)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous government's approach to cannabis under

Stephen Harper did not work. It allowed criminals to profit and did not manage to keep cannabis out of the hands of our youth. We have a great deal of respect for the work the Senate did, and we look forward to carefully examining the committee's report.

Our government will continue to work with its partners to make a responsible transition towards a legal market.

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals said that they would legalize marijuana without having drug-impaired driving laws in effect. With the inability for a roadside test for cannabis use, can the minister please inform this House just how the Liberal government intends to keep Canadians safe on our roads?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem of drug-impaired driving exists today. It is not a problem that will spring to life next week or next month or next year; it exists today. That is why it is so very important to pass Bill C-46. I am glad to hear the official opposition is now fully in support of Bill C-46, and I hope it will join us in encouraging the Senate to deal with it expeditiously.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, there is no plan, but that is no surprise.

While the Liberals made it clear that they want to have pot legalized by the summer, the Minister of Justice has always said that when marijuana is legalized, there would be laws to protect Canadians on the roads. That is why they are bringing in new ones. Why will the minister not delay the legalization of pot until these protections are in place?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Criminal Code already has provisions to deal with drug-impaired driving. Those provisions have been in the law for many years. What we are trying to do is to enhance and strengthen those provisions with what we are adding in Bill C-46. There are new offences, new technology, and new procedures to add to what is already in the Criminal Code.

Again, I thank the opposition for officially endorsing Bill C-46. We are anxious for those members to join with us in encouraging the Senate to pass it promptly.

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[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the plot thickens in the Kinder Morgan saga. Not only are shareholders asking for more information about the project's environmental standards, but we have learned that Kinder Morgan had direct access to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Natural Resources to move their project forward. What a surprise.

Oral Questions

Kyle Marsh, a lobbyist for Kinder Morgan, attended at least three Liberal Party fundraising activities even though all Liberals agreed to not let lobbyists attend their fundraising activities.

The question is simple. Will the Liberals finally tell the truth and admit that Kinder Morgan had direct access from the beginning?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our party recognizes that the environment and the economy go hand in hand. TMX is vital to Canada's strategic interest. The Conservatives do not recognize that the environment is important and the NDP does not recognize just how important the economy is. What we do every day is protect the environment and ensure that our natural resources go to market.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems more like the economy and money go together.

I do not think the Liberals understand how serious this is. Canadians are losing confidence in them. Is a donation or a fundraising dinner what it takes to get the attention of the Prime Minister and his government? Is that what companies have to do to get favours from the Liberal government?

How are people supposed to trust this government? Can the Prime Minister explain the difference between what he is saying and what he is doing?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the NDP has never understood that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. In this case, the project is important to the national interest. When I say "national interest", I mean the interest of the entire country, not just Alberta and British Columbia. We know this is an important project, and as we move forward, we will ensure compliance with all 157 of the conditions attached to it.

• (1430)

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does anyone remember the Liberal promise to end the cash for access fiasco? The minister said at the time that it was always possible to raise the bar. No kidding. The only question in this game of Liberal ethical limbo is how low will the Liberals go.

It turns out that after banning lobbyists from attending Liberal fundraisers, lobbyists from Kinder Morgan attended three Liberal fundraisers for the Prime Minister and finance minister. Why would the Liberals take a bunch of money from a Kinder Morgan lobbyist and how can they expect Canadians not to believe this is simply buying access to the Liberal Party?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our party understands that the environment and the economy go together. We understand that the TMX project is a good project. There are 157 conditions attached to this project. We are also taking serious action on climate change.

We get it. Unfortunately we have one party that does not understand how important the environment is, the Conservative Party, and another party that does not understand how important the economy is. They go together, and we are going to continue going forward.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only thing Liberals understand is how access and cash go hand in hand.

From the very start, all right-thinking people understood that the review of this pipeline was a cruel joke, everyone except the Liberals of course, who broke their promise to redo the process.

Kinder Morgan shareholders passed a motion about first nations rights and concerns about the environment, and that these concerns were raising questions about the progress and prospects of the long-term viability.

Taking money from Kinder Morgan lobbyists, breaking their promises on the environment, how bad has it gotten for Liberals that Kinder Morgan shareholders are more concerned about first nation rights and the environment than the Liberal government who swore to uphold them?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this project went through a full review. We added additional consultations with indigenous peoples. More than 40 indigenous communities have signed impact benefit agreements with the proponent. There are 157 conditions attached. We understand that the project is an important project and that it needs to go ahead.

It is interesting that we have the NDP in Alberta working very hard on this project. It was supported by the previous government in British Columbia.

We need to provide certainty to the market, and this project will go ahead.

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JUSTICE

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite the Minister of Environment to apologize for repeatedly asking the official opposition leader to stand and answer questions. Today, he is attending the funeral of one of our long-time colleagues, and a friend to so many on all sides of the House, Gord Brown. I hope she will apologize.

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my thoughts are with the family of Gord Brown. He was an amazing member of the House of Commons. However, we are entitled to raise important issues. I think that is what everybody expects. That is what Canadians expect.

I will ask once again. Will the party opposite stand and confirm that it stands for a woman's right to choose?

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is pathetic to not apologize.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister has infamously stated that he admires China's dictatorship, and that is quite evident in how he operates. Every time he faces opposition, whether it is in the House or from Canadians, he takes away the tools that opposition parties have to hold him to account. Now he is proposing to limit how and when political parties can spend money that Canadians have freely contributed to support them.

Will he impose those same restrictions on ministerial travel and on government advertising in this newly established pre-election period?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, leading up to the last election, Canadians were justifiably fed up with the Conservative government's misuse of tax dollars for partisan advertising. That is why we moved quickly in 2016 with our new advertising policy to ban partisan government ads and establish third-party oversight. We also banned government advertising in the 90 days that preceded a fixed election and for any government program that had yet to be approved by finance minister by Parliament.

By focusing government advertising on Canadians' needs instead of partisan objectives, we have been able to cut the government's advertising budget by almost half. We will continue to serve the taxpayers of Canada, and be transparent.

• (1435)

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess we will take that as a no. Therefore, we will try another topic, because clearly he does not want to try and deal with the actual problem here.

Getting young people over 18 out to vote is a thing that everyone in the House agrees is a good thing, but what is not right is invading the privacy of children. The Prime Minister's new law will establish a future register of electors for children between the ages of 14 and 17. Yesterday, the Prime Minister disagreed with us when we raised this concern about political parties targeting children.

Again, will the Prime Minister commit that the information about children will not be distributed to political parties or political candidates?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the member's opening comments, we dealt with the problem in the last election. We defeated the Harper Conservatives.

Beyond that, the Conservatives need to understand that what we are doing with the future voter registry is engaging more young Canadians in the political process, such that they can develop their citizenship and be ready to participate in Canada's electoral system fully.

I can confirm for the member across that as a current practice, only the list of eligible voters will be shared with parties and candidates.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals, and especially the Prime Minister, have absolutely no credibility when it comes to electoral reform, because they broke a key election promise. What is worse, they now want to create a

register of future electors for children or young people between the ages of 14 and 17.

I have a very simple and serious question. Will the Prime Minister assure all Canadians that this register will not be accessible to political parties, to ensure that they cannot have access to information regarding Canadian youth?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the current practice will continue.

[*English*]

Under this practice, only the list of actual electors will be shared with political parties. That will not be affected by the establishment of a youth future voting registry, the objective of which is to encourage more young Canadians to participate in the process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to put it mildly, the government is not being very clear. What is clear, however, is that government broke its key election promise on electoral reform. There is something else that we are concerned about, and that is the fact that political parties will not be able to spend the money given to them by Canadians as they see fit before the election campaign.

Will the minister assure Canadians that the ministers will follow exactly the same rules and will not spend any money before the election campaign?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, in leading up to the last election, the Conservatives used quasi-partisan advertising tax dollars to pay for government advertising that was highly partisan. That was one of the reasons why we changed our advertising policy to ban this kind of partisan government advertising and beyond that, to extend 90-days before the actual election the writ period to have the same rules that apply during the writ period, which are very robust rules, to political parties and the government leading up to the writ period.

We are doing exactly that, which—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today Al Gore stated, "The Kinder Morgan pipeline carrying dirty tar sands oil would be a step backward...." Does the government agree with Al Gore, who calls our natural resources dirty and wants to kill the Trans Mountain expansion?

Oral Questions

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has initiated formal financial discussions with Kinder Morgan, the result of which will be to remove uncertainty overhanging the project. We are confident in our jurisdiction in this matter. We are also actively pursuing legislative options that will assert and reinforce the federal jurisdiction in this matter, which we know we clearly have.

Hundreds of thousands of hard-working Canadians depend on this project being built.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in April the government told us that the murdered and missing indigenous women and girls inquiry must put families at the centre of its work. However, it continues to ignore the calls from at least 500 families, many from remote and northern communities, that have not had a chance to speak at the inquiry. In order to heal, the families must be heard.

When will the government extend the mandate of the inquiry so all families can be heard?

• (1440)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ending this ongoing national tragedy. We thank the commission for its work so far.

I am discussing the commission's request for an extension with families and indigenous partners, and our provincial and territorial counterparts.

The independent commission's mandate is clear: families must be at the centre of its work. The families of these women and girls need answers. They need to be heard for the systemic and institutional failures that lead to the murder of far too many indigenous women and girls.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs withdrew from the process of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They felt that the incomplete hearings and the process did not allow for a comprehensive review of the systems that contributed to the violence committed against indigenous women and girls. This is an extremely serious development. Everyone, except the minister responsible, apparently, saw this coming.

Now, how are these women, families, indigenous communities going to heal and move forward?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is determined to put an end to this national tragedy. The mandate of the independent commission is clear: the families have to be at the centre of their work. We are determined to give the families the answers they have long been looking for about the systemic and institutional failures that resulted in this tragedy.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, we learned that the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada has warned Canadian police forces to be on the lookout for members of a violent street gang, the MS-13, attempting to cross the Canadian border. The report told police that MS-13 members will likely exploit the migration of Salvadorans to Canada to set up new cells, most likely in the greater Toronto area, Montreal, and Vancouver.

Can the minister reassure Canadians and tell them that a plan is already in place to prevent MS-13 gang members from entering Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the police and security agencies of the country do surveillance all the time for risks and threats that may pose a danger to the safety of Canadians, both domestically and internationally. We have active arrangements with partners around the world for the appropriate sharing of intelligence.

Canadians can be assured that their police and security agencies are taking all possible steps to make sure we keep Canadians safe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said, and I quote, “I continue to trust and support our national security agencies and officials, and when they highlight that there are concerns around a particular issue, I trust them and I believe them.”

The Prime Minister believes and trusts his security officials.

Does the Prime Minister finally intend to take a serious look at the border crossing crisis and restore order in Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, very obviously, among the CBSA, the RCMP, and the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, a long series of steps are already being taken to deal effectively with that situation.

Our goals are twofold: number one, to make sure that all Canadian laws are thoroughly enforced; and number two, to make sure that all of Canada's international obligations are properly respected. We have achieved those goals thus far, and we intend to continue to do so.

Oral Questions

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Criminal Intelligence Service Canada calls the MS-13 gang “one of the largest and most violent organized crime groups in the world” and notes that the group “exploits migration patterns to set up new cells.” I would consider 50,000 people illegally crossing the border this year from the United States a migration pattern. My question is very simple. When will the Prime Minister close the loophole in the safe third country agreement?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, Canada is an open and welcoming country for people who need protection, but our government is determined to ensure orderly immigration in order to protect Canadians and our immigration system.

Over the past week, ideas have been proposed by a number of parties that do not understand the situation or the agreement. The safe third country agreement is a very important tool that is used by Canada and the United States as they work together to deal with asylum claims. We are working with our American counterparts to make sure that this agreement continues to be followed.

* * *

•(1445)

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister recently met with the President of Uganda, who a *National Post* article today said has been vocally supportive of “legislation that would have made homosexuality punishable by life in prison.” The article also said that our Prime Minister did not raise this issue in his meeting, even though previous Canadian governments have been publicly critical of this law.

The citizenship and immigration committee is about to travel to Uganda. Given this, could the Prime Minister specifically clarify his position on Uganda's anti-homosexuality law?

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is a tireless advocate for LGBTQ2 rights, both at home and abroad. In fact, the defence minister, alongside Louise Arbour, had the chance to raise our concerns about LGBTI issues with the President of Uganda recently. I have had the chance to raise LGBTQ2 and LGBTI issues with other leaders on the African continent recently as well. We are also the co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition, and we will host a global conference that will help advocate for better protection and promotion of LGBTI rights for that community. We continue to do that feverishly here at home and everywhere we travel in the world.

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HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over 10,000 Canadians have died from opioid overdoses since the crisis began, a death toll that continues to mount. U.S. federal and state governments have taken strong action against opioid manufacturers, securing criminal convictions for improper marketing

and recovering over \$700 million in compensation for damages, yet this government has failed to even investigate or pursue compensation for the massive public cost of these dangerous products and the harm caused to Canadian families. Why have the Liberals failed to launch an investigation or pursue compensation as the U.S. has done?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that the current opioid situation is a terrible situation, and our government recognizes that the high level of opioids historically prescribed in Canada has contributed to the devastating impact of the current opioid crisis in our country. We are exploring all options to address the crisis. Unfortunately, at the same time when the United States was pursuing charges against pharmaceutical companies that inappropriately marketed opioids, the former Harper government failed to take similar action. However, I can assure the House that our government is looking at ways to strengthen industry transparency and accountability, and we will have more to report in the coming time.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number of opioid overdoses is increasing at an alarming rate across the country. This is more than a crisis; this is an emergency.

In 2017 alone, there were 4,000 deaths as a result of opioid overdoses. We can no longer call them isolated cases or accidental poisonings. We have to be concerned with the impact on the victims' families and on our health system, which is already overloaded.

When will the Liberal government finally recognize that this is an urgent public health problem and allocate the needed resources to address this situation?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

Canada is in the midst of a national public health crisis and our government is deeply concerned about the tragic consequences right across the country. That is why we are pleased to say that in budget 2018 we committed more than \$230 million to ensure provinces and territories can put services in place and to lighten their financial burden.

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SCIENCE

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that science, technology, engineering, and math are key to Canada's economy. We also know that children are innately curious. We must therefore encourage children to pursue careers in this field. We must find exciting ways to help our children discover science.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities tell the House what our government is doing to encourage young Canadians to get into science?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard for promoting the sciences in Canada. Next week is the Science Odyssey celebration.

[English]

Science Odyssey is Canada's largest celebration of science. From May 11 to May 20, museums, university and college labs, and federal research facilities across Canada will open their doors to Canadians. I encourage all members to promote these events in their communities and join Canadians in exploring the exciting research being done in Canada.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the next chapter in my fishing story with its cast of colourful characters.

Yesterday we learned that the cousin of the wife of the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard runs the company that won the competition for a fishing licence for a highly valued shellfish. The contract was awarded to a company that belongs to the brother of a Liberal MP and will also benefit a former Liberal MP.

Really now, considering all of these conflicts of interest, should the whole process for the fishing licence not be re-tendered?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the previous government, our government decided it was important to bring in a new player in the Arctic surf clam fishery but, unlike the Conservatives, we did not forget to include indigenous communities.

We are proud of our decision, which is going to benefit the highest number of Atlantic Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries has made a sham of the surf clam quota allocation process. He unilaterally expropriated 25% of the quota from one holder. The re-awarded quota went to a company owned by a federal Liberal MP's brother, and also benefits a former Liberal MP. Yesterday, we learned that the cousin of the minister's wife will be heading the company that won the bid. With all of these conflicts of interest, is it not time to restart the allocation process?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our decision to introduce indigenous participation is consistent with our government's commitment to developing a renewed relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples. The minister made his decision to allow for increased indigenous participation in the fishery, and we reject in the strongest of terms any insinuation to the contrary. Our government is proud of this

decision and will continue to focus on how it will directly benefit first nations communities across Atlantic Canada and Quebec.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals brought in a new player all right; they brought in the minister's family to be the new player.

First, the fisheries minister awarded the multi-million dollar contract to a group that did not have a boat, did not have multiple first nations partners, and was not incorporated. Second, most of the contract is not owned by first nations but by the brother of a Liberal MP. Third, the cousin of the minister's wife is heading up the company that won the bid. This is blatant nepotism and abuse of this position. Will the minister commit to restarting this process?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact that there is a new entrant entering the surf clam fishery should be no surprise to the Conservatives. Three years ago, they went through a similar process. The only difference is that they forgot to include indigenous people. Our government did not forget to include indigenous people. In fact, we picked the best deal, which would benefit the highest number of Atlantic Canadians: four indigenous nations from Atlantic Canada and one indigenous nation from Quebec.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first nations were always welcome to be part of the process, but the minister of the past government made sure he kept his hands out of it.

This is just wrong. The Prime Minister tasked his cabinet with living up to "the highest ethical standards". Clearly, the minister has not lived up to these expectations. He is failing indigenous communities. He is failing Canadians. He is failing the people of Grand Bank.

It is time for the minister to acknowledge that it was an inside job. It is a sham, and we would like to hear him stand up today and commit to restarting this process.

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, an increase in indigenous participation in fishing is consistent with our government's commitment to developing a renewed relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples. Enhancing access to the Arctic surf clam fishery broadens the distribution of benefits from this public resource, and it is a powerful step toward reconciliation.

When the previous government went through a very similar public process to access this fishery, it forgot to include indigenous people. We did not.

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HEALTH

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, next week marks the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.

Oral Questions

Once again, the government issued statements of concern, but we see little or no action to back up these concerns. The Liberals promised in the last election to remove the five-year ban on donating blood by men who have sex with men, but instead reduced it to one year.

With no evidence to support the ban and a severe shortage of blood and organs in our health system, will the government now end the gay blood ban and eliminate this form of homophobia?

• (1455)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's blood system is recognized internationally as one of the safest in the world, and it is committed to protecting the safety and security of that supply.

Health Canada is responsible for assessing the safety and quality of the blood and plasma products and, at the same time, the standards that apply regardless of who collects the plasma or whether the donors are paid.

The decision as to whether Canadian plasma donors can be paid rests with the provinces and territories. Our government will continue to work with Canadian Blood Services, Héma-Québec, and other groups to ensure that we can address this blood ban issue.

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[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the *Journal de Montréal* reports that Susan McArthur, a former employee of UBS bank, was a member of the Canada Revenue Agency's board of management at the very moment that the financial scandal at UBS was erupting. By her own admission, her appointment was political patronage, pure and simple. Canada laid no charges against either UBS or its clients, unlike other countries such as the United States and France, which came down hard on them.

In light of today's new information, will the minister agree to conduct a full review of the file to ensure that there was no undue interference?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague that all of these events happened under the Harper government. Currently, there is no problem with the CRA's board of management. The rules are being followed, and everything is in order.

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[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals looked at approving the sale of the largest seniors care home company in British Columbia, we warned them about the murky ownership of Anbang, but they ignored these concerns and rubber-stamped the deal anyway. Since then, the Communist Chinese government has taken control of the company, and its CEO has been sentenced to 18 years in jail.

Having failed every single step of this process, will the Liberals show one iota of humility, apologize to B.C. seniors, and get that company back under Canadian control today?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is open to investment that will grow our economy and create middle-class jobs.

The Investment Canada Act provides for a process to screen these kinds of investments to ensure that they are of an overall net economic benefit to Canada. That was done in this case.

After that review, Cedar Tree made specific commitments to Retirement Concepts and the people of British Columbia. Those commitments are being met and maintained. We are monitoring the situation to ensure that this will happen.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the innovation minister promised Canadians that he had done his research before selling B.C.-based senior care facilities to China's Anbang Insurance.

Now we have learned that the company has been seized by the Communist Chinese government, and that the founder has been sentenced to 18 years in prison. The Liberals never should have approved this sale, which allows these Canadian properties to be controlled by Beijing.

Why did the minister refuse to listen to our warnings? What is he going to do to get these properties back into Canadian hands?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Cedar Tree committed in the investment review process to maintaining levels of full- and part-time employment; to have a Canadian operator, Retirement Concepts, continue to manage the business; not to close or repurpose any of its existing residences; and to maintain a significant level of equity here in Canada. These commitments are being met and are legally binding. The retirement residences remain subject to full provincial regulation, which the Canadian operator must continue to meet or exceed.

All of these conditions are continuing to be met, and we continue to monitor the situation.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year we warned the Liberals against allowing Anbang to buy B.C.'s biggest seniors care provider. We know how that played out: the chairman is now in jail for 18 years.

It gets worse. Now Communist China has proposed a takeover of Aecon, an iconic Canadian company. This has raised serious concerns from security experts and the construction industry. This is a terrible deal for Canada and a threat to our sovereignty and security. How can Canadians trust this Prime Minister to make the right decision on Aecon when he failed so miserably with Anbang?

Oral Questions

● (1500)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have just stated, our government welcomes international investment that will benefit the Canadian economy, but not at the expense of national security. The Investment Canada Act includes a multistep national security review process, which we follow. That rigorous consultation process has been undertaken by our government's national security agencies, and we can confirm that a cabinet order has been issued in that case.

We will continue to do our due diligence to make sure that these investments will benefit Canada and we will never compromise on national security.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immense gaps remain in health outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians. This is particularly true in urban areas like Winnipeg. We also know that one of the stark needs in indigenous communities is the area of mental health, especially when it comes to our youth.

With significant recent investments in health care, can the hon. Minister of Indigenous Services please update Canadians and the House of Commons on the work under way to make mental health support more accessible for those who need it most?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Winnipeg Centre points out, the challenges that indigenous peoples face in terms of mental wellness are complex and deep-rooted.

We have made significant investments in this area. Many people already know about the Hope for Wellness Help Line, which is now available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in five languages. The good news this week is that the Hope for Wellness Help Line is now also available for online chat at hopeforwellness.ca. We hope many indigenous people, particularly youth, will take advantage of this new opportunity to seek support.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, without provocation, the Iranian regime launched a vicious missile attack on Israeli forces in the Golan Heights. It was a gross act of aggression against a steadfast Canadian ally, the only stable democracy in the Middle East. While the Liberals continue to restore relations and lift economic sanctions, the Khamenei regime in Iran continues to spread its human rights violations and to thrust its tentacles of terror across the Middle East.

Will the Liberals stand up for one of our closest allies, Israel, and condemn the unprovoked attacks by the terror-sponsoring regime in Iran?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a steadfast friend and ally of Israel's, we certainly condemn Iran's attack on Israeli military

forces and fully support Israel's right to defend itself against Iranian aggression. We call on Iran to stop any further provocations.

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HEALTH

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, whether it is comments in this House or messages we hear outside, it is clear that the fight for women's equality is far from over. It is not enough to hear the Liberals say they believe in choice; the reality is that many Canadian women, because of where they live, do not have access to abortion services.

It is 2018. We have to stop playing politics on the backs of women in this country. When will the Liberal government step up, enact the Canada Health Act, and ensure that women, no matter where they live, can have access to their reproductive rights?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that every woman has the right to choose, regardless of where she lives. We believe that a woman should have access to reproductive health options no matter where she lives in Canada, in rural or in urban settings.

I recognize that access to these services varies across the country. Our government has eased restrictions on Mifegymiso and made it more available to Canadians in provinces and territories, and we are truly hoping that the provinces and territories will be reimbursing for it. We continue to examine ways to improve access to reproductive health services by women in Canada.

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TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tourism is a huge economic driver in my province of Nova Scotia and especially in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets. Next week, the Rendez-vous Canada conference will be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We will be welcoming members of the tourism industry from not only our country but from around the world.

Can the Minister of Small Business and Tourism update the House on how our government is helping to market Canada tourism to the world?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for South Shore—St. Margarets is absolutely correct. Destination Canada is hosting Rendez-vous Canada, which will highlight Nova Scotia and Canada's tourism industry. Budget 2017 made available \$37.5 million for five years, stabilizing Destination Canada's budget at \$95.5 million.

Destination Canada markets our unique tourism experiences to the world, and we are seeing results. Last year, Canada welcomed 20.8 million visitors, and the tourism industry, which supports 1.8 million Canadian jobs, generated a record of \$97.4 billion in revenue.

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• (1505)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every time we ask a question about Taiwan, the government completely ignores the question and tells us how much it loves China, but the Taiwan-Canada relationship is an important one economically, politically, and strategically, so I want to re-ask a question that was asked yesterday. Hopefully, the parliamentary secretary will answer this time.

Taiwan is being blocked from participating in the World Health Assembly, which is meant to bring the world together for global health. Will the government take a public position to support Taiwan's participation in this vital World Health Assembly?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we certainly continue to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international multi-lateral fora, where its presence provides important contributions to the global public good. Taiwan's role as an observer in the annual World Health Assembly meetings is in the interest of the international health community and it is important to the fight against pandemic and disease.

Canada is disappointed that Taiwan did not receive an invitation this year. We welcome participation from the entire international community to promote global health.

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[Translation]

MARIJUANA

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously adopted a motion calling on the federal government to recognize and respect Quebec's independence when it comes to regulating cannabis in its jurisdiction.

I have a simple question. Will the government respect Quebec's independence when it comes to regulating cannabis in its jurisdiction?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current approach to cannabis is not working. It allows criminals to profit and it has not managed to keep cannabis out of the hands of our children.

We deeply respect the work that the Senate is doing and we look forward to getting their report. Our government is confident that Bill C-45 will pass later this year. Our government will continue to work with its partners to ensure a responsible transition to a legal cannabis market.

Oral Questions

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that was not an answer.

Today we learned that the Research Institute on Self-Determination of Peoples and National Independence, known as the IRAI in French, has been denied charitable status from the Canada Revenue Agency because it is too political.

Never mind that the agency has granted that status to The Federal Idea, which exists to enlighten us on the superiority of federalism. Imagine our surprise when we learned that an overwhelming majority of its board members are Liberal Party donors.

Can the Minister of National Revenue assure us that the decision to deny the IRAI that status was not a political directive?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for giving me this opportunity to acknowledge all the hard work being done by the 41 Liberal members from Quebec on the issues that matter to Quebeckers.

These 41 Liberal members can speak with authority on our concrete action and investment for the middle class in areas like infrastructure, housing, research and development, remote regions, small craft harbours, and broadband networks. Quebec is proud of its 41 MPs.

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MEDIA INDUSTRY

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, speaking of Liberal partisanship, in the latest budget, the government announced that print media could obtain charitable status. Did it come as a surprise to anyone when, yesterday, *La Presse* announced a move to a non-profit charitable model?

I should point out that *La Presse's* board of directors, like The Federal Idea's, is heavily populated with Liberal Party of Canada donors.

Can the minister tell us if *La Presse* would be eligible for charitable status despite its decidedly political editorial policy?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that more and more Canadians are getting their news on the internet. Because of that, our media have to innovate. In budget 2018, in response to calls from the industry, we announced that the government would study new models that would enable media outlets to accept donations.

The budget also included \$50 million to support journalism in underserved communities and \$14 million for community radio stations and newspapers in official language minority communities. We have also allocated \$675 million to CBC/Radio-Canada to ensure good nationwide media coverage that respects journalistic independence, of course.

Routine Proceedings

● (1510)

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Olivia Grange, Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport in Jamaica.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it being Thursday, it is my privilege to ask the Thursday question. I might say as someone who has done a statistical analysis of 30 years' worth of Thursday questions, it is an honour to actually ask the question today.

Could the government House leader inform the House what business the government plans to bring before the House for the remainder of this week and the week we return after our constituency week?

The Leader of the Opposition having designated the finance and citizenship and immigration departments for consideration in committee of the whole, could she inform the House when those two debates in committee of the whole will be scheduled?

[Translation]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will begin debate on Bill C-76, the elections modernization act. This debate will continue tomorrow, and the following week will be a constituency week.

However, if we receive a message from the Senate this afternoon about Bill C-49, the transportation modernization act, this bill will get priority.

[English]

Upon our return following the constituency week, we will resume debate on Bill C-76 on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, we will start debate at report stage and third reading of Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

On Thursday, we will begin debate on Bill C-75, the justice modernization act.

Finally, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), I would like to designate Tuesday, May 22, for consideration in committee of the whole of the main estimates for the Department of Finance, and Thursday, May 24, for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 67(1) of the Official Languages Act, I have the honour to lay upon the table a special report by the Commissioner of Official Languages entitled "A Principled Approach to the Modernization of the Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations".

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

Hon. Scott Brison (for the Minister of National Defence) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-77, an act to amend the National Defence Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present, in both official languages, the 46th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts entitled "Report 6, Royal Military College of Canada—National Defence, of the Fall 2017 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada".

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

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two reports to table.

● (1515)

[Translation]

I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-375, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to pre-sentence reports. The committee has considered the bill and agreed to report it to the House with amendment.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill S-210, 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 committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP) moved:

That the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, presented to the House on Wednesday, December 13, 2017, be concurred in.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to stand in the House today to once again raise the issue around paragraph 38(1)(c) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, better known as medical inadmissibility due to excessive demand.

As many in this place are now aware, this division of IRPA is a cost-only analysis that estimates the potential costs in the use of social and health services that a person applying for permanent residence in Canada could incur.

Currently, under subsection 38(2) of IRPA, convention refugees, protected persons, spouses, and dependants as part of a family sponsorship application are exempt from this restriction. This means that only those who are economic applicants and their families, caregivers, provincial nominees, parents and grandparents, students, foreign workers, and temporary residents would be subject to paragraph 38(1)(c). The provision works in such a way that should one member of a family be found at risk of placing an excessive demand on health or social services, the entire family's application would be rejected.

As I said, this is a cost-only analysis. Not only does it ignore the benefits that an individual brings to Canada, but it also ignores and invalidates the sum of benefits the whole family brings to Canada.

This issue made national headlines in 2016 regarding the case of Professor Felipe Montoya. Professor Montoya came to Canada with his wife, daughter, and son in 2012. He and his wife worked, paid their taxes, and contributed to their community. Their daughter and son attended school in Canada. However, when the Montoya family decided that they wanted to stay here, make Canada their permanent home, and apply for permanent residence, they were rejected. Why? Their son Nico has Down's syndrome.

Following this, last summer, Global News Investigative Journalism brought even more attention to this little-known provision, raising serious questions about how the policy was implemented. There were questions over the so-called basket of services that counted in the calculation and those that did not, why it was that the threshold was set the way it was whether or not the policy was discriminatory, and the impact it was having on families.

In October 2017, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration undertook a study on this provision. We heard from 25 witnesses and received 23 briefs. Committee members heard loud and clear that this provision was legislated discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Of the witnesses that offered their opinion on what should be done with this policy, it was nearly unanimous that the only option was to repeal paragraph 38(1)(c) of IRPA. Anything less would simply continue the discrimination.

In fact, not only were the witnesses who appeared at committee convinced this policy was discriminatory, so too were Liberal MPs. The member for St. John's East stated to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship during the minister's appearance, "I must say that at this point in time I do not see how raising the threshold and excluding fewer people changes the fact

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that excluding anyone is prima facie discriminatory and violates Canadian values."

The member for Surrey Centre changed the opinion he had about the policy during the course of this study and evoked a strong and harsh image where he compared the idea of this policy to the mindset of slave trade. He said, "I would say that initially I thought it was a good policy, because that would perhaps be a big burden on Canadians, but then I looked back—and I don't want to equate it to this—and it's no different from the slave trade, in which only those selected as the strongest and the most able-bodied were brought from Africa. It's not that the whole policy is good at all, but I'm saying it is akin to discriminating when we're picking only people who are healthy, fully functioning, with no intellectual disabilities and no physical disabilities."

The member also summed up the general view of committee members when he said, "As you can tell, almost all of us have an inclination that this policy is discriminatory. We already can see that even within immigration there's a two-tiered policy."

● (1520)

The minister stated on numerous occasions that the policy is "out of step with Canadian values on accommodating people with disabilities." The minister promised changes. Given the near unanimous opinion of witnesses, the strong views of Liberal members on the committee, and the minister's understanding that this policy was wrong, I was hopeful the committee would be able to table a unanimously supported report that called on the government to do one thing and one thing alone, which is to repeal paragraph 38 (1)(c) of IRPA.

Unfortunately, I was to be disappointed. Instead of issuing that report, the committee tabled a report which, while it included repeal as a recommendation, provided the government with a host of interim measures it could take instead. It was as though committee members were no longer worried that this policy was prima facie discriminatory, as the member for St. John's East described it.

As the NDP representative at the committee, I attached a dissenting opinion to the report. I will never forget the story of Mercedes Benitez, a caregiver, who, after nearly a decade of working in Canada waiting to be reunited with her family, was informed her application would be rejected because her son has an intellectual disability. Thankfully, after intense advocacy, support from the public, and media reports, like the Montoya family, she was able to receive an intervention on the file from the minister, which ultimately was approved.

Mercedes Benitez told committee members:

Even though my case is already resolved, I think the excessive demands should be repealed. I still feel the pain when they say I'm good [enough] to work, but not good enough to stay because of my son.

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In this spirit, the NDP moved two recommendations in our dissenting report: one, to repeal paragraph 38(1)(c) of IRPA; and two, for the government to work with the provincial and territorial governments to determine any increased costs to health and social services as a result of this repeal, and to increase CST and CHT funding accordingly.

The minister stated that the government would be announcing its policy change on April 12, 2018. This is because that was the deadline for the government to respond to the committee's report. While the minister did not feel the urgency to act, like many of the families impacted, I was very eager to learn what the minister would do to address this discriminatory policy.

The minister missed his self-imposed deadline, and when he finally got around to announcing the new policy, I truly was disappointed with the announcement. The policy announcement was not to repeal paragraph 38(1)(c). Despite warnings from the member for St. John's East, the government announced it would instead be increasing the threshold from \$6,555 per year to \$20,000, and amended the definition of "social services" by removing references to special education, social and vocational rehabilitation services, and personal support services.

The government expects this will reduce discrimination by 75%. That is not 100%, which is to say that 25% discrimination is okay. While the government states that it agrees with the recommendation to eliminate the policy, it provides no timeline for when that 25% would no longer be discriminated against. At the press conference, the minister stated that this new policy would be forward-going only. This is devastating news for families whose applications were just rejected recently.

The suggestion that they can then apply for permanent residency under humanitarian and compassionate grounds can add up to another three years to the long separation families have already endured. If the H and C application is accepted, only then can they submit a sponsorship application for the family to be reunited. For some families, this additional process may well mean that their children would not qualify to be part of the application as they would have aged out.

In addition, the minister also failed to state whether the new policy would apply to individuals and families with current applications in the system. As a result, many of the individuals impacted by this policy expressed hope, but still worry about the pathway forward. Such is the situation with Monica Mateo Ilarde.

• (1525)

Monica also arrived in Canada as a live-in caregiver in 2008. She has worked hard every day for 10 years taking care of the children of a Canadian family. She has spent most of her 13-year marriage separated from her husband, Richard, and their nine-year-old daughter, Brianna. On most nights, Monica cries herself to sleep from the pain of the separation.

In 2012, she applied for permanent resident status. Monica's permanent resident application was flagged for excessive demand, because her daughter, Brianna, who was cared for by Richard in the Philippines, was born with a visual impairment, a condition that was arbitrarily determined to require "excessive demand" on the

Canadian health care system. Brianna would benefit from speech therapy, and could possibly require surgery, but is otherwise a healthy and happy child.

In December 2017, Monica was expecting her second child. Every effort was made so that Monica could be reunited with her family in Canada so she would not be alone when she gave birth to her second baby. The call for her file to be expedited failed, and she was advised by IRCC that her only option would be to apply for an urgent temporary visitors visa for her husband and daughter if she did not want to be alone during childbirth. After discussing this with her family, it was decided that the cost of applying for these additional visas and the travel expenses was just too much for the family. This is because over the course of the last six years, since first applying for permanent resident status, Monica and her family have had to redo medical exams four times, in addition to security screenings and continued renewals of work permits for Monica.

On January 1, 2018, Monica gave birth to her baby boy, alone, in Canada. Unwaveringly optimistic and driven to reunite with her family in Canada, Monica believes that she was blessed to have her son and sees him as a reward for her isolation. She continues to dream of being permanently reunited with her daughter, Brianna, and her husband, Richard.

According to information provided to Monica, it appears that as long as she is processed under the new rules, her application will finally be completed and successful. That means that her daughter would get to meet her little brother for the first time, and her husband would get to meet his son for the first time.

Her case is one example of why I was so anxious to learn whether the new rules would apply to pending cases. After multiple inquiries, I was finally given assurances from the minister's office, last Sunday night, that applications currently in the system would be assessed under the new rules. For that, I thank the government, and I thank the minister. Monica is hopeful that her case will be processed before this winter so that her family can be reunited here in Canada for Christmas.

Aside from the cases currently being processed in the system, I want to draw members' attention to caregivers who have been providing valuable support and services to families in Canada for years, have been subjected to unjustly long processing delays on their permanent resident applications, and after waiting 10 years, in some cases, to bring their families here, have recently been rejected because of this discriminatory policy. In fact, on Monday, May 7, I held a press conference in Toronto to shine a light on this heartbreaking story.

Shirley Benigno is a single mother of three. Her son, John Nicko, has Down syndrome. Shirley has worked hard her entire life to provide for her family. She first moved to Hong Kong, where she tolerated abuse and harassment in her work environment so that she could send money back home.

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She had hoped her transition to Canada would mean a new beginning for her family. Upon arrival in Canada in 2009 as part of the live-in caregiver program, Shirley started working two jobs and saving all the money she could for her children's move to Canada. She applied for permanent resident status in Canada, and to be reunited with her family, in 2011.

Outside of work, she prepared food for various events, supplied homemade goods for two convenience stores, and took the national food safety training program, with the expectation and hope of one day going back to school and eventually opening her own family restaurant. All this came to an abrupt end, after waiting seven years, when her application for permanent residence was denied in 2017 because of her son's disability. This is despite her son's medical assessment stating that John Nicko is capable of taking care of himself and is even able to work in an unskilled or semi-skilled position.

• (1530)

As result, Shirley's work permit was revoked, depriving her of all income. She could no longer provide for herself, let alone for her family. This meant that she was unable to send money back home to her family, and her children had to leave school, because they could not afford tuition. This is absolutely devastating to Shirley and her family. Shirley stated, in disbelief, "I always thought Canada did not discriminate against people because they are different. I thought Canada had protections for people who are different."

Since the rejection of her application, Shirley has finally been able to obtain legal counsel, who is trying to help her with a request to reconsider her denial. If this is not granted, she will be forced to apply for permanent residence on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, a purely discretionary stream of immigration that could take up to three years to process. Aside from this additional delay, if Shirley had to make a new application, it would mean that one of her children would age out and would not be able to be reunited with Shirley, shattering her dream of having her family here in Canada.

If Shirley's application were processed under the new rules, John Nicko would not be deemed an excessive demand. My office was advised that the estimated cost John Nicko would place on social services would be \$120,000 over five years, which is \$24,000 per year. We were provided with a breakdown of the costs per year: vocational skills training, \$5,000; employment programs, \$7,000; and day programs, \$12,000. Increasing the threshold and exempting the cost of vocational skills training would mean that John Nicko would now be under the threshold and would be eligible for permanent residence in Canada. I brought this case to the attention of the minister, and it is my most sincere hope that he will use his authority to intervene and do what is right.

Shirley and others like her have shown for a decade that she is good enough to be here. She has earned her place in Canada and deserves to be reunited with her family. It would be a great injustice if we allowed individuals like Shirley to be forced to leave after all this time, after all this waiting, because of a discriminatory policy that has now been changed. The minister has the opportunity to prevent such a gross injustice and to do the right thing and allow this family to stay. If the government took that action and applied the new policy to Shirley and her family, they would be able to stay.

It would be reasonable for cases that have recently been rejected, such as in the last 12 months, for example, to be assessed under this new policy. This would not produce excessive demand on our system. During the committee's study, we heard that under the old rules, after appeals and mitigation times, fewer than 400 of the 1,000 cases per year flagged under paragraph 38(1)(c) were ultimately rejected.

We have the opportunity to do what is right and to undo the hardships our system has caused for families through a policy we all know was out of step with our values.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to remind the members of this House that in February, I tabled Bill C-398, which would repeal paragraph 38(1)(c). I would like to once again inform the government that I would be happy to work with the government to make this bill the government's own bill. Until that happens, until that discriminatory policy is repealed, the government can do something for the families that have been waiting for years and years, especially those families that have just recently been rejected. The government can apply the new rules to them and reopen their cases so that they have the opportunity to reunite with their families here. It is the right thing to do. I hope that I can hear a positive response from the government side with respect to this request.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech. I also want to thank her and all of the other committee members for their work. As we said, this policy is over 40 years old. I think the measures we have taken are a step in the right direction. I understand that my colleague would have liked us to go even further, but we want to take a balanced approach. We are going to work with the provinces and territories and consult them on this issue, because we know it can have an impact. We have said over and over, and the minister has also said many times, that we want to move forward with a view to one day eliminating this policy. However, we need to take the time to consult the provinces and territories more so that we can gather even more solid evidence on this matter.

Does the member not agree that we should take more time to consult the provinces and territories, like the provincial government in British Columbia, which, incidentally, is an NDP government that has also asked us to take our time and do consultations? We recognize that this policy is having an impact on families, and that is why we have decided to triple the threshold.

Should we take a little more time to consult the provinces and territories on this issue?

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The minister has been consulting on this issue for almost two years, and now the government says it needs to continue to consult. I am okay with that, really. I would rather the government had done the right thing, knowing that it is the right thing to repeal this discriminatory provision.

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The committee heard from officials who said that there are about 1,000 cases under this provision that have come before them. It was also stated by committee members, Liberal members at that, that the cost would not be that onerous. That said, the government has made a decision, and I accept that the government gets to make these decisions. What I am asking today, though, is that the government consider applying the new policy to existing cases that have recently been rejected. It is projected by the government's own officials that in a year, there may be about 400 cases that fall under that category.

I made comments about Shirley's family. She has been here for 10 years, and her case was rejected, under the old policy, just in January of this year and then again in March of this year. The right thing to do is for the government to reopen her case under the new rules so that she can be assessed under the new rules and be allowed to bring her family here. Otherwise, one of her sons would—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank and congratulate my hon. colleague from Vancouver East for a passionate, brilliant, and long-overdue proposal that ought to be supported by every member of this House.

Canadians would be shocked to know that we still have embedded in our official immigration law a provision that is so discriminatory, so outmoded, so stereotypical, that no modern democracy that exists in a pluralistic society could possibly justify it. That is a section of our Immigration Act that says that when people come to Canada, work, and fulfill their obligations under a program such as the temporary foreign worker program, and then seek to sponsor their families, they and all of their family members can all be rejected if one of the family members has a certain condition, such as Down syndrome, deafness, or an intellectual disability. Underpinning that is the outmoded notion that these people are somehow a burden. People with Down syndrome, people who are deaf, and people with intellectual deficits are not burdens. These people have every ability to be fine citizens and contributing members of our society.

This typically arises when a live-in caregiver comes here. Does the member agree that we could perhaps have a system whereby caregivers are allowed to bring their spouses and children with them when they first come here so that families can be left intact? We could get rid of this outmoded system under which they are separated from their families, only to find two, three, four, five, or six years later that they and their families are no longer admissible to Canada after doing everything they were obligated to do under this system. Would she agree with that policy?

• (1540)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. People who have disabilities of any type bring more to the community than just their disabilities. We should not be identifying them by their disabilities but as whole people. This is something we do under this policy, and it is wrong. It is also, by the way, in violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

On the issue of what is the right thing to do, I am a long-time proponent of the notion that if a person is good enough to work, the person is good enough to stay, and that includes caregivers. They are

the only people in the immigration stream who are separated from their families and have to work two years before they can even make an application to bring their families here under the economic class, and that should not be the case. Absolutely, I would agree that those people should be able to bring their families to Canada on arrival. No family, no mother, should have to endure what these caregivers have to endure with the separation from their children.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very familiar with the live-in caregiver program. I have been dealing with it for over 25 years as an elected representative, both in the Manitoba legislature and now in Ottawa. It is a fantastic program, which was introduced many years ago. Yes, there are flaws, and no doubt it can be improved. This government has demonstrated its ability to improve the system.

It was not that long ago, a year or so ago, when we had huge backlogs in processing individuals who were in Canada as live-in caregivers. After they met the requirements, they would wait years before their applications were actually processed.

We have a government that has been very proactive on the immigration file. An excellent example of that is the live-in caregiver program. Now we see live-in caregiver processing being done within the year. That is an amazing difference from what it was when Stephen Harper was the prime minister of Canada.

We now have a program that allows more of the types of cases being accepted. This government is moving forward on these very important issues. It was a Liberal administration that created the live-in caregiver program. Prior to that, people came in under a working visa, and then after the working visa expired, they would go back and then apply.

This whole program was initiated by a Liberal administration. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has been proactively improving the program and meeting many of the needs about which the member across the way has talked.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question, but let me say this.

With respect to the changes in the program, there is some welcome news. I held many round tables with caregivers. In fact, I had people literally crying, telling me they had been in the system for 10 years and had been waiting for their cases to be processed, and still no action.

I brought this up with the previous minister, John McCallum, and with the current minister. I have held press conferences, and so on. The minister announced a 12-month processing time. I was at that press conference. The minister cited the case, which I brought to the minister's attention, of Joy who after 10 years had finally had her case processed. He cited why that was wrong, and then he made the changes.

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I am glad some messages are being heard by the government on this front. I am asking for this one piece. The government has brought in a policy to address the issue of discrimination on the basis of disability. This new policy needs to apply to those cases that were just recently rejected, those people who have waited for 10 years to be reunited, only to be assessed under the old rule with the new rules just around the corner. They will not be able to bring their families here under the old rule.

If we open those cases, we will allow for those families to have an opportunity to be reunited. If people are worried about opening the floodgates and about there being thousands of cases, that will not happen. The officials said that in a given year we would be looking at about 400 cases. It is not that many, and it will make such a difference in the lives of those people.

I urge the government to do the right thing. We can continue to work on this file. I will continue to push for section 38(1)(c) to be repealed, but in the meantime, let us do something for those families that have suffered so much already, to make their lives better and to make those hardships mean something, so they can have their families here, reunited with them, making Canada their home.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate. On behalf of the government, I would like to begin by thanking my Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration colleagues for their work and diligence in producing this report. I would also thank the many witnesses who appeared before the committee for the time and effort they put into sharing their viewpoints, analyses, and recommendations.

Our government reviewed the key aspects of medical admissibility and excessive demand to ensure that our policies are in line with our country's modern values. The report includes a number of important recommendations that helped inform the conclusions of the review. Our government's objective is to strike a balance between protecting state-funded health and social services and promoting the humanitarian goals of Canada's immigration system.

Under the excessive demand policy, applicants who are likely to create a greater burden on our health or social services than the average Canadian are deemed inadmissible to Canada. However, the policy was no longer consistent with modern values on accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities. Under the policy, immigration officers review applications on a case-by-case basis in order to determine the potential impact on health or social services by assessing the services required by the applicant, the cost of those services, and the impact on the waiting lists. Recently, some determinations made under the current 40-year-old policy raised a lot of concerns. For example, there were a certain number of eligible applicants who were initially deemed inadmissible to Canada because their children, for instance, had Down's syndrome or autism, or were developmentally delayed.

In 2018, Canadians can see that such decisions are inconsistent with society's view on inclusion and diversity, as well as on the contributions made by people with disabilities and their families.

Canadians see these services as investments that allow for the participation and inclusion of people with disabilities, which contributes to making our society more diverse and even stronger.

We also recognize that, when qualified applicants are found inadmissible because a member of their family has a disability, we are missing out on skills that could benefit our country and its economy. That is why we must now make our policies more equitable and foster the inclusion of people with disabilities while continuing to protect government-funded health and social services.

As I said, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada reviewed the provision that was raised by the committee and my colleagues. As part of that process, our government sought the opinions of stakeholders, including advocates for people with disabilities, and our provincial and territorial counterparts. The committee's recommendations made a significant contribution to this review and helped our government to come up with a new approach and implement a policy that will stand the test of time.

As per the committee's recommendations, our government is making significant changes to the existing policy. These include removing special education services, social and vocational rehabilitation services, and personal support services from the factors taken into consideration in the current policy. This will help strike a better balance between the fair treatment of people with disabilities and the protection of government-funded health and social services, which will be good for applicants who have children with disabilities and others who need those services.

Our government has also tripled the cost threshold for excessive demand. This measure will remedy the fact that the current policy sometimes prevented the arrival of newcomers with relatively low costs who would otherwise contribute to Canada. This measure will enhance fairness by facilitating immigration for applicants with health problems that usually require a limited range of health and social services that are relatively inexpensive.

Based on our government's assessment, which was shared with our provincial and territorial counterparts, this will have a minimal impact on health care systems. These cases represent less than 0.1% of all Canadian health expenditures. At the same time, it will permit the entry of several hundred applicants who, under the current policy, would be refused entry to Canada.

The excessive demand provision does not apply to some categories of applicants, such as refugees and certain members of the family class. The provision mainly affects applicants in the economic class, or those people we invite to Canada because the economy needs their skills.

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Our government recognizes that people with very high medical expenses that exceed the threshold I mentioned could have a disproportionate effect on provincial and territorial health care systems.

● (1550)

This is why, before taking any measures other than the ones I described, our government will consult the provinces and territories about the impact of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration's recommendation to repeal the excessive demand provision.

Our government will start a rigorous data-collection and data-analysis process, share the results with our provincial and territorial partners, and continue to engage our partners to guarantee an effective implementation of the policy changes that I described. We will also monitor the impact of these changes.

This process will also give our government additional information so that we can draw conclusions on the impact of fully eliminating the excessive demand provision. We will develop a policy based on this evidence.

We are also monitoring the ongoing effects of the excessive demand provision and the policy on its work, its clients, and on the provinces and territories. The committee recommended that a full parliamentary review be conducted every three years once these changes are implemented, and representatives would be pleased to accommodate the committee if it wants to conduct such a review.

In my remaining time, I would like to address some of the committee's recommendations regarding the administration of the policy. Once again, the government welcomes the committee's advice on ways to improve administrative measures, for example, and the customer experience, and will implement some of those measures to reach these objectives very quickly.

We are currently centralizing all applications that fall under this policy within a single office in Canada for more efficient processing. This measure will ensure more consistent and effective decision-making, since one team will be dedicated to decision-making with respect to excessive demand.

Our government also agrees with the committee's recommendations regarding proper training for immigration officers and the doctors responsible for decision-making. Our government will review the options for supplementing or adapting the existing training, to ensure that it is more in sync with the changes made to the policy.

Our government will also conduct an expert analysis of the methodology used to set the excessive demand threshold and will present the formula to applicants and the Canadian public in the interest of transparency. Because of the change resulting in certain services no longer being included under the revised policy, the IRCC will revise the cost threshold.

In summary, our government is committed to making sure that the policy on accessibility and immigration applicants continues to recognize the need to protect health, education, and social services, while treating all applicants equally. The changes our government is making to the excessive demand provision will strike the appropriate

balance and be reflective of the modern values of an inclusive country for persons with disabilities.

I want to reiterate that the committee's report makes a very valuable contribution to our government's efforts to carry out a fundamental review of the excessive demand policy, and we agree with its intentions. The recommendations it sets out are constructive, well-informed, and extremely useful. Again, I wish to thank the committee members for their work.

Our government appreciates their ongoing efforts in this area and their interest in ensuring that our immigration system continues to adapt and evolve to keep pace with the modern values of Canadian society.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to talk about this important issue. Again, we want to take our time in order to take a balanced approach. We want to consult the provinces and territories and the various stakeholders to ensure that we may one day be able to eliminate the 40-year-old excessive burden policy.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the parliamentary secretary. In my speech, I asked whether the government would consider applying the new policy to recently rejected cases, those individuals, let us say, who in the last 12 months had been rejected. Instead of making them go through a new application process, could their cases be reopened and allow for that assessment under the new rules?

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

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

Once again, this policy is 40 years old. We have improved it a little and we want to make other improvements. What I can tell the member is that the new policy will apply to cases currently in the system. We will have discussions with the department to ensure that other cases can be assessed in a different manner.

I wish to assure the member that cases currently in the system will be assessed under the new policy, and we want to ensure that this policy reflects the needs of persons with disabilities in the country. That is why we tripled the cost. With regard to the applications, we have also removed certain provisions such as rehabilitation services, for example. We believe that more people will be able to come to Canada as a result of this new policy. We will continue to work collaboratively with everyone to ensure that this policy is eliminated altogether in the future.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for the parliamentary secretary is simply whether or not the government intends to vote to concur in the report.

[*Translation*]

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

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Once again, I believe that the changes we have made to this policy are a step in the right direction because they update a 40-year-old policy. We have accepted the recommendations of certain groups who asked that we review this policy. We have tripled the cost threshold. We have removed services such as rehabilitation services, or services that were no longer required in the assessment of certain applications.

We will continue to work closely with the provinces and territories to ensure that we have sound and reliable data in order to completely eliminate this policy in the future. That is our goal. The minister repeated this several times. We will work together to ensure that we achieve this goal.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that the minister's office sent my office an email this past Sunday night in answer to the question I put to him about whether or not the new policy would apply to existing cases. I got the email Sunday night affirming that this would be the case. I am happy with that and I thank the minister for that decision.

My question here is very specific. For the cases that have just recently been rejected, such as the case of Shirley, who only just saw her case rejected as recently as March of this year, I am asking whether or not the government will allow for the reconsideration of these cases under the new rules.

It makes a big difference to this family, because if they have to reapply under the humanitarian and compassionate grounds process, or any other stream. It would mean that their children, who are older, will have aged out and would not be able to become part of that application.

Those families have waited for 10 years to be reunited and they would have been approved under this new policy. If we make them put in a new application, they will lose one of their children and will have to leave that child behind. That is wrong. I hope the member would agree that it is wrong. I hope the government would agree that it is wrong. My question is this: will the government apply the new rules to the recently rejected cases?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech and as I repeated to my colleague, the cases currently in the system will be analyzed and reviewed in accordance with the new policy. It will not be retroactive, but claimants may file a new application under the new policy.

We think that these people will greatly benefit from the new measures in the revised policy, such as tripling the cost of certain services or eliminating some rehabilitation and other services. They will likely be approved as a result of this new policy and our new measure. I am happy to discuss this point with my colleague at any time.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I accept that, with this exception, and I hope the member understands the difference. For those families that have to reapply under the new rules, the older children, those who are older than 21, will have aged out. They will not qualify to be

part of that family unit. That is the difference. That is the point I am trying to get at: to not bring in new policy to qualify these individuals, only to then break the family up, because that is what will happen if the government makes those individuals make a new application. It would break the family up, because the older children will have aged out and cannot be part of the application process.

If the intent is to allow for them to apply anyway, why not make them whole and allow for those families to come together as a unit simply by reopening their cases for reconsideration? I am not talking about retroactive for 30 years; I am only talking about the recent cases, of which, according to the officials, there are no more than 400 in a year on average.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I said earlier: the cases currently in the system will be reviewed in accordance with the new policy. Older cases will not be reviewed, but, once again, claimants may file a new application under the new policy. We sincerely believe that with these new measures, people who file new applications will have more chances to be accepted. For example, the cost threshold has tripled. We also removed rehabilitation services and all those things.

Once again, the new policy that we implemented is a step in the right direction. The policy was more than 40 years old. We want to ensure that persons with disabilities who want to come to Canada are able to do so. These people make significant contributions to our society, and, as I said in my speech earlier, an individual or family being denied entry to Canada because a child is autistic or has Down's syndrome, for example, does not reflect our values today. This is why we took these new measures and will continue in this direction to potentially eliminate this entire policy at some point.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague would highlight some of the changes we made within the program, changes that ultimately reduced the processing times to a year. Prior, under Stephen Harper, people would wait years to be processed as live-in caregivers after they had met the criteria. We are now doing it in 12 months, which is a significant change.

The other change is with respect to dealing with many of the types of cases that the member across the way is referring to, and we have advanced that also.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Yes, as he said, with respect to caregivers, we have considerably reduced wait times for reuniting these families. Wait times for family reunification have dropped from 26 months under the previous government to 12 months under our government. These are the types of proactive changes we have made in a number of areas in the immigration department.

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We also want to take a more accessible client-focussed approach and we want it to be much easier to understand how to apply, for instance, for family reunification. The changes we have made since we have been in government are very positive and will help families reunite much quicker. That is what we want. We also want to ensure that some families can come to Canada even if, for example, some family members have a disability. This policy reflects our values and what we, as a government, think is the right thing to do in terms of the excessive demand policy.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the parliamentary secretary, I would like to thank the witnesses who appeared before the committee to provide testimony for the context of this report. I also would like to thank all of my colleagues on the committee, who undertook a very rigorous study of this issue.

The Conservative Party of Canada did append a dissenting report to this report on behalf of the official opposition. Today I will highlight some of the differences of opinion that our party had and some of the similarities that we had with the main recommendations that were put forward. I believe the New Democratic Party also put forward a dissenting opinion, although I could be wrong on that. Perhaps my colleague will correct me or remind me.

For anyone who is watching, and for the purpose of the debate, the content of the study was on the medical inadmissibility and excessive demand regulations for potential newcomers. In particular, the committee reviewed paragraph 38(1)(c) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which states that a foreign national is inadmissible on health grounds if his or her health condition “might reasonably be expected to cause excessive demand on health or social services.”

After careful examination of the limited evidence made available to us at the committee, committee members in my party were left with many unanswered questions and felt that data was lacking. Nonetheless, we wanted to state that there are ways the current regulations could be better applied and that Canada's immigration system must strike the right balance between protecting the health and social services that Canadians rely on and ensuring that the excessive demand clause is not hindering our ability to attract and retain immigrants. We felt that the main body of committee's report, as adopted, was lacking in this regard. It is in that context that we submitted the dissenting report.

Canada is a generous and welcoming country. Since Confederation, millions have immigrated to Canada to start a new life, get a job, open a business, raise a family, or escape persecution. Our country has been enriched by the multicultural nature of our communities and has warmly embraced the diversity of our citizens.

In order to continue to welcome immigrants to Canada, the general public must support the overall objectives of our immigration system. Everyday Canadians need to trust that the system is efficient and of benefit to the country. Throughout the study, the committee discovered many flaws and irregularities in the application of existing medical inadmissibility regulations. The committee heard suggestions on how to improve the service delivery and how the department, IRCC, can update unnecessary and confusing bureaucratic language during the application process.

Throughout our meetings, questions were frequently based on the question of fairness in the context of competing interests: If demand for specialized services was increased due to a total removal of the excessive demand provision, would that be fair to Canadians who have already waited months on a wait-list? Would it be fair to provinces and territories that are already having cash issues in terms of their budget? Is it fair if someone who wants to immigrate to Canada is rejected because it was determined that this person or someone in their family would cause excessive demand on our health or social services?

In terms of the excessive demand clause, one of the things I had some questions about was the difficulty of finding any sort of modelling or quantitative data on the projected increase in demand if paragraph 38(1)(c) were repealed and if we could look back at even the data that were available for past years. I remember the chair had to ask a lot of questions of officials on how the numbers were calculated, because it is a confusing formula. One of the things we asked over and over again was whether, if this paragraph were to be repealed, there would there be an increase in demand that was not forecast by a previous year's number, since people were self-deselecting from the application process because they knew they would not be eligible under the current paragraph 38(1)(c). Without that data, it would be difficult for provinces to forecast what the future demand on provincial health care systems would be, so we noted that in our dissenting report.

● (1605)

We also noted the fact that at that time consultation was still ongoing with the provincial governments, which the minister had not made available to the committee. There were only a few committees that actually put forward their recommendations. There were several provinces that were very hesitant and critical about the flat out repeal of 38(1)(c), as is recommended in the report, due to questions around the potential cost and whether Ottawa would foot the bill, as it were.

Again, I want to that ensure the system is fair and that we do not lose people due to this provision. On the other hand, without the data to understand what the potential demand could be or how we would pay for that demand, that lack of data was not congruent with some of the recommendations in the report. We tried to outline that logic very soundly in the dissenting report.

The other component was sort of an amazing business case. If we had just repealed this section, then we would remove all of the bureaucratic costs associated with processing these applications. However, again, we did not have the data with respect to the anticipated demand on the health care system. In fact, even with the government's current changes, I am not sure we have the data on what the demand on the health care system would be. I think provincial governments are still asking those questions. It is very difficult to make that argument, because we cannot look at one basket of costs to the other without that modelling being done.

On determining excessive demand costs, I want to read through some of our thoughts on that. We state:

An individualized medical assessment must be undertaken to determine excessive demand. This is to ensure that every individual's current and future health and social service needs are taken into consideration.

The Canadian Bar Association (CBA) provided the committee with two briefs and appeared in person to provide recommendations. In the evidence submitted to the committee, they outlined the challenges associated with how IRCC calculates the costs to determine if someone is projected to cause an excessive demand on health and social services.

The difficulties in estimating the costs for special education needs were brought to the committee's attention. As education is a provincial jurisdiction, no two provinces that are identical in how they determine funding levels to assist students with special education needs. For example, Ontario's Inclusive Education Model funding is different than how Manitoba supports special education needs as every school division is unique in how support is provided for students with special needs.

There is also a discrepancy between provinces with financial support for prescription drugs. In some provinces medically required services are covered in full while outpatient drug costs are not automatically covered. There are also disparities in the amount of what each province reimburses residents for various prescription drugs.

The CBA noted that the IRCC's Central Medical Accessibility Unit, which was recently introduced, might alleviate some of the challenges in determining the true costs in determining if one will cause an excessive demand. However, they are urging IRCC to improve its Medical Officer's Handbook and to work with provincial and territorial governments to get the most up-to-date and accurate costing information available for the intended place of residence of the applicant. Denying applicants based on irrelevant information is not acceptable and all steps must be taken to ensure the accuracy of cost estimates.

Furthermore, there were circumstances where IRCC took so long to review a medical assessment that it was deemed out of date. Due to IRCC's wait times for processing excessive demand applications, 886 applicants needed a new independent medical assessment. In our opinion this is unacceptable and IRCC needs to improve its service delivery if medical assessments are not being reviewed in a timely manner.

I do not think that was actually addressed in the government's response. Certainly that was something we wanted to see.

With respect to the procedural fairness letters, there were several comments made by witnesses who were confused by them. They "often do not provide enough information for the applicant in a meaningful way. In many circumstances the language used in the letters is overly bureaucratic and is difficult to decipher." We go on to say, "Further, because IRCC mails Procedural Fairness Letters, the time it takes for the physical letter to arrive cuts into the already short 60 days that applicants are given to provide an answer. We were informed due to the time delays with mailing a letter to various parts of the globe...it is difficult for an applicant to respond..."

• (1610)

We heard a lot of testimony around sort of the nebulosity of the mitigation plan. We did not actually look at a template mitigation plan, even though it was discussed in broad strokes of what one might include. We thought it would be helpful to review how IRCC communicated what was expected in an applicant's mitigation plan. Our aim would be for IRCC to provide as much guidance as possible for applicants to improve the level of information received and to decrease the amount of appeal.

Our conclusion in the dissenting report was "It is evident that numerous provinces have hesitations on completely eliminating the excessive demand clause", which was one of the key recommendations of the report. "Yet, numerous concerns were raised with the implementation of the current policy. Our job as policymakers is to strike the right balance of protecting our health and social services

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while also meeting Canada's immigration needs. We want our immigration policies to be fair and compassionate. We also firmly believe that Canadians must trust and support the overall immigration system."

However, this is where, again, there was a lack of data. When we are talking about potentially adding cost to Canada's health care system, and we are in a significant deficit situation, as are many provincial governments, it is worthwhile for us to look at that modelling, especially when there were very anecdotal stories.

I want to be perfectly clear. There were some very heartbreaking stories brought forward in committee, but as policy-makers, we also have to ask what the overall likely demand would be created by the repeal of section 38(1)(c). There were some anecdotal stories about the fact that, if this was repealed, we would have more economic immigrants who would be highly successful, but there really was not any data brought forward to back up that claim.

Overall, we felt there was a lack of data to really analyze the cost of repealing section 38(1)(c). Then subsequent to that, it was difficult to question the government on how it would plan to finance that particular change. Certainly, as a Conservative, I have great hesitancy with putting forward major changes that might affect provincial spending without that piece of information.

The recommendations that we put forward in our dissenting report were:

1. That any change to 38(1) (c) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act must be done in full consultation with provinces and territories.
2. That provinces and territories be given a formal procedure to waive the excessive demand clause for an applicant they deem is essential for their province and where they fully accept the costs associated with the applicant.
3. That IRCC create a process where provinces and territories on a yearly basis provide the most up-to-date costing information for health and social services to improve the accuracy when determining excessive demand cases. Furthermore, we recommend this costing information be made public and accessible.
4. That IRCC take all necessary steps to eliminate delays that result in an applicant needing a new independent medical assessment for no fault of their own; for example by digitizing the process.
5. That IRCC immediately work to simplify Procedural Fairness Letters to ensure they are easy to understand and expected outcomes are clear to the applicant.
6. That IRCC involve provinces and territories to review the efficacy of mitigation plan, including an exploration of the enforcement of mitigation plans and to measure their success in cost avoidance.
7. That IRCC review its training process to ensure that officers are aware of their obligation to provide a detailed breakdown of expected costs to health and social services.

We did provide a fairly robust and balanced dissenting report. I would hope that as we go forward, as the parliamentary secretary has said, the government is committed to reviewing its plan in the future. I would like to see some formal modelling of any sort of increased demand be included in that review to understand how much of an extra burden this would place on provincial health care systems, in combination with that data around economic migration. Also, much of the report did not talk about some of those administrative changes that could be made to streamline the system for applicants as well.

Routine Proceedings

That was the opinion of the Conservative Party of Canada. With respect to this concurrence debate, that opinion would stand.

•(1615)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to answer the member's question about whether the NDP put forward a dissenting opinion, yes, we did. Our dissenting opinion has two recommendations. One is for the government to repeal section 38(1) (c), and the other is to work with the provincial and territorial governments to ensure they are resourced accordingly coming out of this provision.

With that said, I understand the Conservatives' point of view, but I would ask this question.

The government has put in a new policy. Would the member support the concept of allowing the government to reopen cases for those who have just recently been rejected, which, according to officials, there are no more than 400 cases approximately a year, and apply the new policy to them? This would particularly address the issue of those families that are forced to make a new application but have children who are older and have aged-out. Therefore, these children would not be part of that family unit, and the family would suffer the consequences of having to make a decision of their family being separated once again.

•(1620)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her clarification on the status of her party's dissenting report. In order to answer that question as a policy-maker, I would want to know what the total cost impact would be by province and whether the provincial governments would support incurring that cost.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and her work at committee.

Does she think that refusing an application from someone who has an intellectual disability, such as a child with autism or Down's syndrome, reflects our Canadian values?

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, we expect our immigration policies to be fair and compassionate. We believe Canadians should trust and support the overall immigration system. As policy-makers, we need to ensure we strike the right balance between protecting our health and social services, while also meeting Canada's immigration needs.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had an opportunity to speak with a resident in Whitby, Mark Wafer, who has hired many individuals who have disabilities. I have done a couple of consultations.

The one thing that people with disabilities talk about is their willingness to work and the capacity for them to do more than adequate work, actually increasing the bottom line for a lot of companies. While my colleague talks about the cost, there is also a benefit these individuals would bring to Canada's economy.

Does the member not agree that this approach of the government is a logical first step? I agree there is room to improve, to continue to talk to the provinces and territories, but this has a benefit as well to Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I certainly support ensuring that people with disabilities, especially such people autism, are included. One of my colleagues has an autistic son and he does a lot of very good work on behalf of the community.

I would remind my colleague that just over a year ago she voted against an opposition motion to reverse the Prime Minister's cold-hearted decision to reject the Canadian Autism Partnership project. I find it very rich that she would stand here and make comments about cost-benefit after her government has racked up a lot of debt and refuses to fund the Canadian Autism Partnership project.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, the worth of an individual is more than his or her disability. We need to look at an individual as a whole, not seeing a person with a disability as a cost issue.

On this issue, the other thing people should know, if they are not aware, is that the cost-benefit analysis, and the government calls it that, did not take into account the benefit side of this analysis. There is no benefit analysis to this equation. It is only a cost issue.

There are only approximately 400 cases per year, and not all of them would necessarily fall under the category that would fit with the new policy. Spread across the country, the cost to the provinces and territories would be negligible. I would ask the member to take that into consideration.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in my speech, that particular data was not made available to committee, which is why we noted it in the dissenting report.

To reiterate, our immigration policy should be fair and compassionate. Our job as policy-makers is to strike the right balance of protecting our health and social services while also meeting Canada's immigration needs.

•(1625)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, part of the question I was going to pose may have already been answered.

First, I want to congratulate my colleague on the great work she has done on behalf of refugees and immigrants coming into Canada. She has done a stellar job of drawing attention to some of the most oppressed people on our planet. We on this side of the House want to show compassion for those people.

My understanding is that during the committee study, there was some difficulty in obtaining data regarding the cost of various policy options related to medical inadmissibility. I wonder if my colleague could provide more detail on exactly what data was missing.

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Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, there were two streams of policy alternatives that I heard in terms of witness testimony: either fully repeal paragraph 38(1)(c) or make a wide variety of changes to the existing policy. The government has made some changes. As I mentioned in my speech, there are some things I would like to see that I think would reduce the administrative burden on people trying to enter this process.

I just want to reiterate my full support. We heard cases that were really difficult, and we want to approach policy changes with heart and compassion. In terms of data, I found it interesting that we went to CIHI and some pretty robust sources of health data, and we could not get any sort of modelling that would tell us what the long-term potential demand on the system would be.

This is not to say whether or not we would have supported that, but if we are going to make a change like that, it is incumbent upon the government to make plans to pay for it. We are stewards of taxpayer dollars, so while we have an obligation to be compassionate and protect the most vulnerable, the other side of the equation, which many of us here often forget, is that we have to pay for things. It is not us paying for things; it is Canadians paying for things. We want to ensure that we are compassionate. We also want to make sure that we have plans to see sustainability in the social programs Canadians depend upon.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, because my hon. colleague brought up my voting record on autism, I will say that I voted against that because there was money going to a particular organization. I would remind her that in budget 2018 we provided over \$20 million to various autism agencies that we have continued to advocate for. My background in neurological research lends itself to ensuring that we support individuals and families with autism.

I will go back to my previous question. I know it is not just about cost and benefit when we are talking about people with disabilities, but does the member not think that there is a benefit, and not just a cost, to having individuals with disabilities come to Canada? Although we could continue to work with provinces and territories, it is still a granted and compassionate first step to ensure that individuals have an opportunity to come here and contribute to our economy.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, the logical fallacy in my colleague's argument is that she is making an assertion I did not make. I do believe Canada's entire immigration system should think about compassion and how we can meet the needs of Canada's economy through immigration. Certainly, we should have initiatives that support and ensure the full participation in every aspect of Canada for people who have disabilities. We should not be looking at programming or policy that is going to put barriers in place for people who already have barriers every day.

Again, the member opposite voted against a motion that I think was for \$2.3 million. I am looking to my colleague from Edmonton, who does a lot of work on autism. The member opposite stands and takes credit for this, when it is actually my colleague from Edmonton who has done years of work. He probably went to a million community meetings, and he put pressure on the government to get some acknowledgement for this in the massive bazillion-dollar deficit budget.

I do not think there is a single Liberal who can stand in the House and take any credit for the work on autism participation in the Canadian economy without looking across the aisle and giving credit to my colleague from Edmonton.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1630)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until Tuesday, May 22, 2018, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Tuesday, May 22, 2018, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

[*Translation*]

The House will now continue with the remaining business under routine proceedings.

* * *

PETITIONS

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present what I believe will be the first of many petitions in response to a question the Minister of Transport asked about demand for a high-frequency train when he was in Trois-Rivières.

Since then, my office has been inundated with petitioners who want him to know that they have been waiting 25 years for the train to come back to Trois-Rivières to support economic development and reduce greenhouse gases. The people of Trois-Rivières are prepared to do their part to get the train up and running in Canada's most densely populated corridor, the Quebec City-Windsor corridor.

Government Orders

[English]

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today signed by Canadians requesting that Parliament support Bill C-316, an act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act regarding organ donors.

Today there are 4,500 Canadians awaiting a life-saving organ or tissue transplant. The majority of Canadians support organ and tissue donation. However, only 25% are registered as donors. Bill C-316 would make it easier for Canadians to indicate their desire to donate their organs and tissues through their annual tax returns. This information would then be shared with the provincial and territorial governments so that the names of those Canadians who want to help save lives could be added to existing donor registries.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1635)

[Translation]

ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.) moved that Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to begin the debate at second reading of Bill C-76, the elections modernization act.

[English]

Our democracy is stronger when more Canadians, not fewer, are able to participate in our elections. Our government believes that democratic institutions and election rules must keep pace with changes in society and the expectations of our citizens. The elections modernization act is an important step forward for our democracy and for the ability of Canadians to participate in and trust our democratic institutions.

The changes we are proposing under the elections modernization act will make the electoral process more accessible to all Canadians, will help modernize the administration and enforcement of election rules, will make the electoral process more secure and transparent, and will protect the integrity of the Canadian electoral system, while better protecting the personal information and privacy of Canadian citizens.

[Translation]

We believe that our democracy is stronger when as many Canadians as possible participate in it.

[English]

In 2014, the previous government passed the Fair Elections Act. This was a regressive piece of legislation that former chief electoral officer Marc Mayrand said contained measures that would “undermine [its] stated purpose and won’t serve Canadians well.” One hundred and sixty academics signed a *National Post* editorial stating that the Fair Elections Act would “damage the institution at the heart of our country’s democracy: voting in federal elections.” *The Globe and Mail* ran five editorial board pieces, pleading with the Conservatives to reconsider that legislation.

The Harper Conservatives did not listen to reason. They did not pay attention to evidence, and Canadians paid the price. After the passage of the so-called Fair Elections Act, we saw the disenfranchisement of more than 170,000 Canadian voters who lacked sufficient identification. That is according to Statistics Canada. We saw it become more difficult for Canadians to get information about where, when, and how to vote. We saw it become easier for elections lawbreakers to actually evade punishment.

Unlike the Conservatives, we are listening to Canadians. We want Canadians to be able to participate in our democracy.

[Translation]

By repealing the unfair provisions of the Harper government’s Fair Elections Act, we are making it easier for all Canadians to vote.

[English]

In April, I was pleased to introduce the elections modernization act on behalf of our government. Not only would it undo the controversial aspects of the Conservatives’ so-called Fair Elections Act, but it would strengthen our democratic institutions by making voting more accessible to millions of Canadians who have previously faced unfair barriers.

[Translation]

I will illustrate some of the proposed changes by focusing on four groups of voters: Canadians with disabilities, women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces, Canadian citizens living abroad, and those who do not have the identification required under the Fair Elections Act.

[English]

To ensure Canadians with disabilities are better able to participate in our democracy, Bill C-76 confirms existing accessibility practices and further requires a combination of measures to be available to all persons with disabilities, regardless of the nature of that disability. Bill C-76 creates financial incentives for political parties and candidates to accommodate electors with disabilities. These could include providing election material in accessible formats or adding wheelchair ramps to campaign offices, as examples. It makes changes to election expense provisions so that candidates with disabilities or candidates who are caregivers for young, sick, or disabled loved ones would find it easier to run for office.

Government Orders

•(1640)

For these individuals, costs related to this caregiving could be paid from either personal or campaign expenses and would not count against spending limits. These expenses would be reimbursed at up to 90%.

Canadian Forces members make tremendous sacrifices defending our democracy. It only makes sense that we make sure they are able to participate in it as well. In the most recent election, 68% of Canadian electors voted. Among members of the Canadian Forces, the participation rate was only 46%. The bill would give Canadian Forces personnel the same flexibility as other Canadians in choosing how to cast their vote.

Canadians living abroad are no less dedicated to our country than those who reside within its borders, yet many are not able to vote. The bill restores voting rights to more than a million Canadians living abroad by removing the provisions that electors cannot have resided outside of Canada for more than five years and must have an intent to return.

Debates in the last Parliament highlighted a fourth group of Canadians who have challenges when it comes to participating in elections. These are citizens who do not have the required identification. The previous government stopped the use of voter information cards as an allowable piece of ID to establish residency. This happened despite Elections Canada's observation that some four million Canadians do not possess a driver's licence. Canadians impacted most by the Conservatives' regressive law change included university students, indigenous peoples, and in some cases seniors who live in long-term retirement facilities.

We will restore voting rights to these Canadians and we will also restore the practice of vouching for identity and residence. This will help bring eligible voters back into our electoral process. Those who vouch for others would continue to be required to make a solemn declaration and would not be able to vouch for more than one person.

Conservatives may try to say that this would make it easier for non-citizens to vote, but that is simply not the case. In his 2011 compliance report for Elections Canada, Harry Neufeld, an independent elections expert, recommended "widening use of the Voter Information Card as a valid piece of address identification for all voters."

To ensure that only Canadian citizens are able to vote, the bill would authorize the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to provide the Chief Electoral Officer with information about permanent residents and foreign nationals living in Canada. This would help ensure that only Canadian citizens are included in the register of electors and would help to create a more accurate and up-to-date list of voters. The bill would also grant the commissioner of Elections Canada the ability to impose a financial penalty on individuals who vote when they are not able to do so.

Today Canadians are busier than ever. They work irregular hours. They do shift work. They travel for business and pleasure, and they have parenting or caregiver responsibilities that start before dawn and end late in the evening. As a result, more and more Canadians vote at advance polls. We would increase the hours during which

these polls are open to provide more flexibility and enable more Canadians to participate in the electoral process.

The bill would restore the Chief Electoral Officer's authority to conduct public education and information activities to help inform Canadians about the voting process. Through the bill, we would empower young Canadians to pre-register for elections so that when they turn 18, they are automatically registered to vote. As well, the bill would make it easier to hire Canadians aged 16 to 18 as election officers, giving them an opportunity to get engaged earlier in the electoral process.

•(1645)

While we are making it easier for Canadians to vote, we are also making it more difficult for elections lawbreakers to evade punishment. The bill sanctions the powers of the Commissioner of Canada Elections and offers a wider range of remedies for enforcement.

Through the bill, the commissioner would again report to the Chief Electoral Officer and would have new powers to impose administrative monetary penalties for minor violations of the law, have the authority to lay charges, and be able to apply for a court order to compel testimony during investigation of election offences.

Budget 2018 would also provide \$7.1 million to support the work of the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections. This funding would help ensure that the Canadian electoral process continues to uphold the highest standards of democracy.

[*Translation*]

In 2017, the Prime Minister expressly gave the Minister of Democratic Institutions a broad mandate to enhance the openness and fairness of Canada's public institutions. Part of that mandate is to deal with foreign influence and emerging technologies.

[*English*]

Last year, the member for Burlington, my predecessor and soon-to-be successor in the role of Minister of Democratic Institutions, asked the Communications Security Establishment to conduct a study on cyber-threats to our democratic processes. This first-of-its-kind public report found that there was no evidence of nation states interfering in the 2015 Canadian election, but that there has been an upward trend in cyber-threat activity against democratic processes globally.

We take that report seriously. It found that over a 12-month period, 13% of elections globally had some level of foreign interference. We recognize the seriousness of this threat. We cannot afford to ignore these threats and we have a responsibility to defend the integrity of our electoral system.

Government Orders

We are moving forward to protect our democratic institutions from cyber-threats and foreign interference. In budget 2018, the Government of Canada provided approximately \$750 million for the creation of a new Canadian centre for cybersecurity. Budget 2018 also sets aside more than \$100 million over the next five years for the creation of a national cybercrime coordination unit. These organizations will bring together expertise from across government, coordinate investigations, and protect and defend our government and democratic institutions from cyber-threats.

Bill C-76 takes a step forward in addressing potential manipulation of social media by prohibiting the malicious use of computers where there is an intent to obstruct, interrupt, or interfere with the lawful use of computer data during an election period.

Current provisions of the Canada Elections Act that deal with publishing false statements are, according to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, unenforceable. The bill before us would narrow the focus to information about criminal records and biographical information. A new provision would prohibit distribution of material intended to mislead the public as to its source.

Most importantly, we are closing the loophole that has previously allowed foreign entities to spend money in Canadian elections.

As a result of news reports earlier this year, Canadians are rightly concerned about the way private corporations use their personal information for political ends. I want to reassure Canadians that in Canada these corporations are already regulated under the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, PIPEDA, but that does not mean our work is done. Through this bill, we are requiring for the first time that political parties be transparent about the steps they are taking to protect Canadians' personal information.

Bill C-76 requires political parties to have a publicly available privacy policy addressing a series of privacy issues in terms of how a party collects or gathers data, how it uses data, how it shares data. A party that does not meet these criteria will face deregistration by Elections Canada.

• (1650)

I also hope that colleagues on the procedure and House affairs committee, PROC, will revisit their study on privacy and political parties and provide recommendations on the issue. It was less than a year ago that PROC took a look at this issue and recommended no changes, but I think all members would recognize that the ground has shifted on this issue and that it bears revisiting by PROC. PROC represents all parties, so it makes a great deal of sense for it to be the vehicle to do a deeper dive into this.

Some of the measures in this legislation may be familiar to members of the House, as they were introduced previously in Bill C-33. This underscores the breadth and depth of input and advice that has gone into the bill before us.

This legislation has also benefited from the input of the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities. I would like to thank them for their work. I want to thank parliamentarians who contributed to this at PROC, and I also want to thank Elections Canada. Eighty-five per cent of the recommendations from Elections Canada after the last election were incorporated into the bill. The report's findings after the last election

are very much at the heart of the bill. Again, I want to thank the members of PROC, who conducted a detailed analysis of the Chief Electoral Officer's report.

Our government is committed to strengthening Canada's democratic institutions. We are committed to maintaining the trust of Canadians in our democratic processes. Bill C-76 would advance that agenda, and I urge hon. members to move expeditiously on it so that it can be in place for the October 2019 general election.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have an opportunity to debate this piece of legislation more officially in the House. We already had a chance to have some back and forth in question period, but we will now have the chance to do that here in official debate in the House of Commons.

There are obviously a number of things I find of concern, but my biggest concern is that the Liberals and the Prime Minister seem to continually try to find ways to damage themselves, to find ways to prevent opposition, and to find ways to tip the scales in their favour. We have seen that a number of times, whether it be breaking their promise on electoral reform or whether it be trying to change the rules of the House of Commons to suit themselves. We see potentially more of that in this piece of legislation as well.

I want to focus on one topic, and it is a topic on which we had a bit of an exchange in question period earlier today. I want to talk about the idea of spending limits. The government is making some changes, obviously, that would prevent political parties from being able to use funds truly given to them by Canadians in a period prior to the election, but it is not doing the same for government advertising and ministerial travel, at least not for the same time period.

I wonder if the minister would commit to making changes to the bill that would line those periods up so that it would not disadvantage the opposition parties in such a way. Would it line those timelines up so that those directives, in terms of the limits on ministerial travel and government advertising, would be the same? I wonder if the minister would make a commitment to make that amendment today.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his work on the whole area of democratic institutions.

One of the first things we did as a government was bring in a new advertising policy. That was in the spring of 2016. That advertising policy, among other things, would ban, and has banned, our government and future governments from engaging in quasi-partisan, political-type advertising with tax dollars. The previous government did a lot of that, and we did not think it was right, so we followed through as a government.

That advertising policy would also apply the same restrictions to government advertising that apply during the writ period to the 90-day period leading up to the writ. That would prevent a governing party, ours and future governing parties, from using that period leading up to the election to engage in government advertising that is actually focused on promoting the governing party. We do not think it is right to do that. We have also cut government advertising quite significantly over the previous government.

Government Orders

We think the steps we have taken are in the interest of fair and open elections.

• (1655)

The Deputy Speaker: I note that there is a lot of interest in posing questions and comments for the minister. I am going to ask all members to keep their interventions to no more than a minute.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join this debate. It is a debate that has been long looked for because, if members will recall, 18 months ago the Liberals introduced a bill to affect our elections going forward and then for 18 months they did nothing. They did not bring the bill forward for debate and did not talk about it. Also, 18 months ago, we were given notice that the Chief Electoral Officer was leaving, and for 18 months we did not have anyone, until we had a name a few weeks ago which was then changed to another name which the government has now decided to make public.

One of the grave concerns we had about the unfair elections act, as the minister rightly points out, was the attempt at voter suppression by the previous government. The government of the day did two things. One, it moved unilaterally. Only the government ended up supporting legislation that affects all parties and all Canadians. Two, the government shut down debate on the bill almost immediately.

I am looking for a commitment here today from the minister. I ask him not to do it, not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Incredibly cynical parties in the past have chosen to try to suppress the vote here and suppress the voices here in the House of Commons. Liberals were critical when they sat on this side. I am looking for a direct commitment from the minister not to follow the same path. I ask him to commit that the government will not limit debate on this bill, and that he will make sure that we can allow members to speak, and not proceed—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his engagement on the whole area of electoral reform. As he has indicated, he agrees and the NDP members have expressed in principle support for much of what is in this bill, particularly for the components of this bill that reflect the report of Elections Canada after the last election. Eighty-five per cent of that report is in this bill, in particular those elements that reverse some of the more regressive measures of the Conservatives' so-called Fair Elections Act.

The member also expressed a concern that I share, in terms of making sure that these changes are in place to be in effect for the next election. Given that there has been a lot of study—I believe 30 hours at PROC—around this issue, at some point we are sawing sawdust. The hon. member has expressed concerns of having this in place for the next election. If we put those two together, we would very much appreciate his support and the NDP's support for moving forward in good faith in a timely way to make sure that the new—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister talked about using a voter information card and reinstating that as a form of identification. In the last election 986,613 voter information cards were reported to have inaccurate information, were sent to wrong addresses, and had erroneous information.

Can the minister address why he is using as a piece of identification for voters something that for as many as a million voters had inaccurate information?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, one of the recommendations from Elections Canada, having had the opportunity to analyze the impact of the changes that the previous government made in eliminating vouching and voter information cards, was that we bring back voter information cards. In fact, I mentioned earlier that over 160 experts on elections felt it was the wrong decision, and Stats Canada has said that in fact 170,000 Canadians who ought to have been able to vote did not have the opportunity as a result of that. We believe democracy is stronger when more Canadians participate, and that is why we are bringing it back.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Mulroney government appointed the Lortie commission on electoral reform. The government of Jean Chrétien followed through on a number of the commission's recommendations, including by reforming the electoral financing system and overhauling the political financing rules. We cleaned up political financing in Canada.

[*English*]

However, that tradition of consensus was largely abandoned, unfortunately, in the last Parliament not once, not twice, but several times by the Harper government which retroactively changed election laws, laws respecting leadership campaigns, and so on, and suppressed votes. The one thing that most Canadians took extreme offence to was the suppression of votes and particularly the suppression of young people's votes. Can the minister tell us how he is correcting that historic error by encouraging and getting more Canadian youth to vote?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, again, we believe very strongly that having more Canadians active in the political process, including in elections, is really important and vital for our democracy. That really starts with young Canadians.

To have a registry of future voters and to engage young Canadians early by giving them an opportunity to work in elections is really important. We think restoring the ability and the mandate of Elections Canada to promote engagement and to do outreach makes a great deal of sense. That is why it is in this bill.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the President of the Treasury Board for his speech.

Obviously, we would have preferred the bill to have been tabled sooner. The President of the Treasury Board says he would like the bill to be passed quickly so that it is in place for the next election. We would have liked the bill to be more substantial, especially by including a proportional voting option. That option was abandoned in spite of a unanimous report from the committee that was supported by every party in the House. We would also have liked to see public financing included in this bill, which it is not. Enhanced public financing of political parties could help our elected officials avoid the appearance of acting in their own financial interests.

My question is about the youth vote. Students are often registered to vote in their parents' riding, but they live near their college or university. This makes it hard for them to vote.

What measures does Bill C-76 provide to make voting easier for students who do not live in the riding where they are registered?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question.

Again, it is very important to increase flexibility to help voters participate in the electoral process, just as it is very important to protect the integrity of our voting system.

[English]

To restore vouching, as an example, is one area of flexibility. The member raises a very good point about students having the opportunity. Their addresses are sometimes transient because they live in different places.

Again, vouching requires an individual to make a solemn pledge and take an oath as to somebody's identity. It is not something that is entered into frivolously. People can only vouch for one person. That is one example.

I would be interested to ensure that young people who are not living at their parents' address have that flexibility. I think that is one example of how voter information cards or vouching can provide a necessary and important flexibility to ensure that they have the opportunity to vote.

● (1705)

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank all hon. members for their co-operation. We went a couple of minutes over, but the minister was a little short in his 20-minute speech, which allowed a little more time for some questions. It was very good participation in that regard.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today and participate in the debate on Bill C-76, the amendments to the Canada Elections Act.

One of the privileges we have in Canada and as Canadians is to participate in free and fair elections. I do not think there is anyone in this House who would disagree with the importance of that privilege and honour that we have as Canadian citizens to participate in our democratic rights.

However, the government has shown its inability to properly introduce legislation to change our elections. In fact, the acting Chief Electoral Officer made it very clear to Parliament and at committee that in order for Elections Canada to make the changes necessary for the next election in 2019, legislation had to receive royal assent by April 2018. Here we are in May, only just kicking off debate on this matter.

On April 24, 2018, at committee, the acting Chief Electoral Officer, Stéphane Perrault, had this to say to the procedure and House affairs committee:

When I appeared last February I indicated that the window of opportunity to implement major changes in time for the next election was rapidly closing. That was not a new message. Both Monsieur Mayrand and I had previously indicated that legislative changes should be enacted by April 2018. This means that we are now at a point where the implementation of new legislation will likely involve some compromises.

Later in his comments he said:

However, it is also my responsibility to inform you that time is quickly running out. Canadians trust Elections Canada to deliver robust and reliable elections, and we do not want to find ourselves in the situation where the quality of the electoral process is impacted.

[Translation]

The government tabled Bill C-76 in April 2018, the same day legislation was supposed to be in place. The government botched the entire process for implementing changes to the Canada Elections Act. As a result of its mismanagement, the government had to introduce this omnibus bill in order to play catch-up and distract from past failures.

The Chief Electoral Officer provided recommendations for legislative reforms following the 42nd general election in 2015. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs was reviewing the recommendations and preparing a report for this House. Then, on November 24, 2016, before the committee had completed its work, the former minister of democratic institutions introduced Bill C-33, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. She introduced an incomplete bill and demonstrated a blatant disregard for the committee's work.

Then, after rushing to create a bill and, in their haste, creating a flawed bill, the Liberals stalled. They have been sitting on the bill and have still not brought it forward for debate at second reading a year and a half later. If we add to that their failed attempt to change Canada's electoral system to favour their party, the tremendous delay to appoint a permanent Chief Electoral Officer, and the incomprehensible action to perhaps create a debates commission, this government's democratic reform has been a colossal disappointment. The Liberals waited well beyond the April 2018 deadline to introduce Bill C-76.

● (1710)

What is more, Bill C-76 is an omnibus bill. It is 350 pages long and contains hundreds of different sections. At best, it contains seven vastly different elements. Many of these elements are flawed, and not only will they not improve our elections, but in some cases they will actually weaken them.

Government Orders

[English]

This brings me to one of the key points contained in the bill, which is the subject of identification. The government is clearly out of touch with what is reasonable in the 21st century.

Today, photo ID and identification with one's address is commonly and routinely used for interactions with governments at all levels, whether federal, provincial or municipal. Under the current law, nearly 50 different types of identification are permitted to allow a Canadian voter to prove his or her identity and address.

Canadians are used to using identification. In Canada, no one bats an eye when he or she is required to show ID to board a plane. No one bats an eye when he or she is required to show ID to prove his or her age to purchase alcohol or tobacco. Students are regularly required to show ID when they take VIA Rail to get the student discount. When we drive a car, we need a driver's licence. When we go fishing, we have a fishing licence. When we go to get a prescription for medication, we show identification. Even to borrow a library book, we need a library card, which, I might add, in most municipalities is free. What is more, when we get that library card, we can also use it as one of the acceptable forms of ID with Elections Canada.

I am proud to have a library card for both the Wellington county libraries and the libraries in Perth county, and I use them regularly. I encourage all Canadians to go to their local libraries and get a card.

Let us look at the list of some of the identification that is currently approved by Elections Canada. Of course, there is the driver's licence or a provincial or territorial ID card. In Ontario, that includes both a photo ID as well as an address on those cards. Also, there is the Canadian passport, a birth certificate, and a label on a prescription container.

It has been mentioned before that perhaps those living in a retirement home or a long-term care home may have a challenge finding identification. However, I would challenge anyone to show me a senior who may be living in a long-term care home who does not have perhaps a pill bottle or prescription that has his or her name and identification on it. Another case would be an identity bracelet issued by a hospital or long-term care facility. Also, one could use a credit card, debit card, or employee card.

The minister talked about students. Nearly every student in high school, college, trade school, or a university has a student card. Most students also have a bus pass or public transportation card. It is unfortunate that the Liberals got rid of the public transit tax credit but, nonetheless, most students do have a transit card, particularly if they do not have a driver's licence.

One could also use a licence or card issued for fishing, trapping, or hunting, one of the great pastimes in Canada. One could use a utility bill, whether that be for electricity, water, telecommunications, cable, or satellite. What is more, Elections Canada also accepts either e-statements or e-invoices for that type of ID. In a growing technological world, I know many of us receive our bills solely online, which is an acceptable form of ID.

One could use a personal cheque, a government statement of benefits, or an income tax assessment. All Canadians are required to

file their taxes every year. April 30 was just upon us, and I am sure all Canadians remember that well, with the Liberal government in power.

• (1715)

One could use correspondence issued by a school, college, or university. Again, a student going to college or university in Canada would potentially have that letter. Barring that, it could be a letter of confirmation of residence from a place such as a student residence, for those attending university, or a seniors residence, a long-term care home, a shelter, or a soup kitchen, so that those who may not have a permanent fixed address would still have confirmation of their eligibility to vote.

There is also a third option, in which an oath can be taken to provide confirmation of one's address from someone within the same electoral district undertaking that confirmation.

Most Canadians would see these rules as reasonable and fair. The rules ensure that only those who are eligible electors vote, and that they vote in the correct riding. Canadians are rule-loving people. We respect the rules. When we are asked to prove that we are in fact legitimate voters within an electoral district in Canada, we are happy to do so.

This brings me to the government's decision to use the voter information card as identification. It is an information card, not an identification card, as is often said by members across the way. These are information cards because that is what they provide, information. It has been stated before that, in the 2015 election, 986,613 of these voter information cards had inaccurate information, were sent to the wrong address, or were not complete, yet the Liberals are okay with nearly a million voter information cards being used as identification.

Canadians know that things change. Addresses change, and the voters list is not always entirely up to date. Nonetheless, the Liberals are relying on that information to be used to confirm residence within a riding.

One of the challenges with using the voters list and the voter information cards is that much of this information comes from the Canada Revenue Agency. I will cite a couple of examples where the CRA has mistakenly declared people dead, yet this information is now being used to inform the voters list, and then the voter information card, which entitles people to vote.

I would draw the members' attention to an article from November 2017 in which a Scarborough woman was declared dead and her estate was sent her tax refund of nearly \$2,800. Another example recently from CBC, in April 2018, talked about a Cape Breton man whose error on a tax return declared both him and his late wife dead, despite the fact that he never submitted a death certificate for himself. Again, this information is being used to inform the voter information cards, which the Liberals now want to use as a confirmation of an address.

Government Orders

The minister also said that the Liberals would be removing the voting restrictions for those living outside of Canada, removing the five-year limitation and the intent to return to Canada. There are two points on this matter. First, it might be reasonable for Canadians who want to see this country prosper and thrive to at least give an indication that at some point in the future they wish to return and live in this great country we call Canada.

Second, when we look at our Commonwealth cousins and the example of Commonwealth countries around the world, we see that they have similar provisions in place. In the United Kingdom, a national who leaves for more than 15 years is not eligible to vote in a national election. In Australia, the length of time is six years.

● (1720)

I want to talk briefly about foreign financing. The Liberal government tries to claim it is shutting the door on foreign financing, that it is blocking foreign influence in elections. What is actually happening is it is opening up a great big loophole that will allow foreign influence to funnel large amounts of money into U.S.-style super PACs to be distributed within Canada during an election campaign.

In a recent article, John Ivison writes:

In the last election, foreign money wielded by political advocacy groups targeted Conservative candidates—Leadnow claimed its 6,000 volunteers helped defeat 25 Tories.

Leadnow said no international money went towards the campaign. However, the New York-based Tides Foundation donated \$795,300 to a B.C.-based non-profit called the Sisu Institute Society, which in turn donated to Leadnow.

Leadnow acknowledges Sisu contributed grants for its “other campaigns” but said the election campaign was funded entirely by Canadian sources. Yet, as Duff Conacher at Democracy Watch pointed out, this is nonsense. “Any grant frees up other money, if it’s all in one pot.”

There is nothing in the new bill to stop this from happening again.

Another example comes from our good friend Andrew Coyne, who wrote:

But let’s examine those much-hyped measures to “protect and defend” Canadian democracy. For example, we are told the bill will prohibit foreign entities “from spending any money to influence elections.” Wonderful, you say: how much were they allowed to spend until now? Er, \$500.

But then, the real scandal, to borrow Michael Kinsley’s phrase, is not what is illegal—direct foreign spending on Canadian elections—but what’s legal: foreign money, by the millions, funneled through Canadian intermediaries, which pass it on to domestic advocacy groups to spend.

This is wrong, and Canadians understand that this is not the way that Canadian elections ought to be run. Creating loopholes that we could drive a Mack truck through, allowing foreign influence in Canadian elections, is wrong, and Canadians understand that. They understand that so much of what the Liberal government is doing in the bill is wrong. Canadians believe that voters should be required to prove their identity before they vote. Canadians believe that proper identification is necessary before they vote in an election. They believe that foreign influence in Canadian elections is wrong and that loopholes should not be allowed in the bill, as the Liberals have done.

Canadians also wonder about the lack of urgency of the Liberal government. We have known for a year and a half that we would need a Chief Electoral Officer, and yet the Liberals waited 18 months. They introduced Bill C-33 and let it languish on the Order

Paper, and now, at a point in time when the Liberal government has been told directly by the Chief Electoral Officer that they do not have time to implement the changes, the Liberals are proposing to go ahead anyway with this information.

It is for this reason that I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following:

the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments, since the Bill fails to address the high error rate in the National Register of Electors, and the high rate of erroneous Voter Identification Cards, reported at 986,613 instances in the 2015 election, and does nothing to deal with foreign interference in Canadian elections because the Bill proposes to double the total maximum third party spending amount allowed during the writ period and to continue to allow unlimited contributions in the period prior to the pre-writ period.

● (1725)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comment, the hon. member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what this legislation does is to get youth more involved in the electoral process. I think it is a good thing when our youth are involved in our democracy, so I would like to ask my colleagues across the way why they are now opposing the youth electoral registry when at committee they supported it.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, we all encourage young people to vote. I am always honoured in my campaign to have enthusiastic young people out there. A lot of the time, those who cannot even vote yet are coming out to help me on my campaigns. In my riding association I have a 14-year-old and a 16-year-old who are super-eager and excited. We are all going to encourage young people to vote.

However, let us go back to the point that I raised in my speech about identification. The Liberals keep going back to the point that young people and students do not have identification, but as we have clearly shown, nearly 50 types of eligible identification are permissible for those students, including student ID cards or a letter from a college or university or an institution such as that.

We need to encourage young people to vote, and we as a party and we as parliamentarians will be doing all we can as candidates in the next election to encourage young people to vote. I would encourage the Liberals to do the same, rather than trying to introduce a 350-page omnibus elections bill that the Chief Electoral Officer clearly showed should have been introduced and passed by last month, yet here we are only just beginning debate today.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was looking forward to this debate because we have been waiting so long for it.

We had clear indications from Elections Canada that they needed new legislation to have passed both the House of Commons and the Senate and to have received royal recommendation to be law. Elections Canada warned the government more than a year ago that this was required.

I am not sure that my friend's efforts to amend the bill in the way that he has is really going to help us along the path. Someone once said that a lack of effort on their part does not create a crisis on our part. I asked the Treasury Board secretary earlier if he would commit to not fast-tracking the bill, thus shutting down debate, because it is very large, at 350 pages, and incredibly complex. It also deals with constitutional rights, such as freedom of speech and access to the Canadian electoral system.

My basic question is this, though. If the Conservatives are only going to offer to try to derail the bill, I am not sure that it sets us up well for the 2019 election. This bill was introduced by the Liberal government on the very day that Elections Canada had told them that they needed the legislation passed. Canadians can be rightly quite cynical and skeptical as to whether the Liberals are truly committed to fulfilling their promises to the changes that they ran on in the last campaign.

To my friend, on the specific amendment that he has moved, what is the effort and what eventual goal do the Conservatives have in advancing the conversation around our democracy?

• (1730)

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley on one particular point, which is that the Liberals cannot be trusted to implement what they ran on. They ran on one policy and then in the end failed to deliver on so many of the policies that they introduced.

The purpose of the amendment was clear. This is a flawed piece of legislation and we do not believe that we should proceed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): When debate continues, the hon. member for Perth—Wellington will have approximately five minutes coming back to him for further questions and comments.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-326, An Act to amend the Department of Health Act (drinking water guidelines), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 23, 2018, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[Translation]

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again in the House to bring up an issue that is drawing a lot of attention in my riding. I now have many constituents asking me about the Aecon deal.

I see the parliamentary secretary is ready to answer my question. Hopefully, I will get an answer because I know that the deal is supposed to be either confirmed or rejected by the government by the end of May. I hope the parliamentary secretary will be able to illuminate the House on some of the considerations that will go into the decision, or whether he can inform us on whether the government will do the right thing, which would be to reject the Aecon takeover by a China-controlled state-owned company.

We know that experts in the national security field have called into question this entire deal, from top to bottom. One of them said:

It seems to me very difficult for the government to approve the Aecon acquisition without incurring significant risks to national security going forward...It would certainly not be my recommendation to allow it to proceed.

This is a former CSIS director, saying that proceeding with the Aecon deal would not be in the national security interests of Canada. I would tend to agree with him.

Adjournment Proceedings

In the House, I brought up the China state-owned company's record in Bangladesh, where it was barred from bidding on contracts because the Bangladeshi government deemed it too corrupt to do business with. I brought up the point that it had been banned by the World Bank for an extended period of time for bidding on international projects. I brought up the fact that the same China-controlled state-owned company purchased the John Holland Group in Australia. In Australia, that same John Holland Group is now implicated in a fiasco involving the construction of a children's hospital, with an asbestos-laden roof, lead in the water, and construction defects, amounting to an over \$300 million difference between the cost of the project and what is outstanding.

All of these examples point to the fact that the Government of Canada should not proceed with the approval of this takeover of Aecon.

There are also a lot of other issues. The promoters of the project have said that this will inject new capital. That is simply not true. Large-scale construction companies like Aecon, or Graham Construction or PCL do not build public infrastructure just because they can. They typically build it on behalf of governments, such as a school, hospital, or a dam project, with money from that government. These companies are just transitory. It is a transition of cash between the two. There is no injection of new money.

The real concern that national security experts in this field have is that every single one of these large-scale public projects have things like warranties. Companies like Aecon have access to maintenance logs, the entire warranty infrastructure of the particular building or project, so they know how the buildings are maintained, what goes into the buildings, what type of material has been used.

Again, the question I have for the parliamentary secretary is this. Could he tell the House whether the Government of Canada will be taking into consideration every single example I have just mentioned before proceeding with this takeover of Aecon by a China state-owned corporation, and handing over control of one of the largest, most successful Canadian-based construction companies to the Chinese Communist Party?

• (1735)

[Translation]

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the comments made earlier by the hon. member for Calgary Shepard concerning foreign investment in Canada.

First, I would like to point out that foreign investment plays an important role in Canada's economic development. Our government looks favourably on foreign investment when there is a net benefit to Canada. At the same time, our government takes seriously its responsibility to protect Canadians against threats to national security.

The Investment Canada Act is an integral part of the framework that supports these two objectives. Under the provisions of the act, the Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development examines and approves significant foreign investments before they are made. Only when the minister is satisfied that a foreign

investment is likely to be of net benefit to Canada will it be approved.

Furthermore, the strong national security provisions of the act state that any foreign investment, no matter the size or origin, requires a national security review to guarantee that the investments are not injurious to Canada's national security.

The national security review process begins as soon as the minister is informed of an investment. Investors must supply a large amount of detailed information about themselves, including their business activities, their principals, and the possibility of foreign state influence.

In accordance with the act, Canadian security organizations thoroughly analyze all the information provided by the investor, as well as additional evidence and information. These organizations are the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Communications Security Establishment, and the Department of National Defence.

The hon. member referred to a contract in Australia for the construction of a children's hospital. I cannot speak to the execution of that contract, but I can confirm that the proposed acquisition of the Canadian company Aecon is under review pursuant to the national security provisions of the Investment Canada Act.

As indicated in the guidelines on the national security review of investments, which our government published in December 2016, Canadian security agencies carefully evaluate many factors during a national security review, including potential risks to Canada's defence capabilities and interests, the transfer of sensitive technology, and the security of Canada's critical infrastructure, as well as any impact on Canada's international interests, or potential links to terrorism or organized crime.

The legislation provides a strong, evidence-based regulatory framework for reviewing foreign investments in order to determine the net benefit to Canada and the potential risks to national security, and we are following that process. Foreign investments are made in Canada only after careful review of the evidence and consideration of the professional advice from our security agencies.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, none of what the parliamentary secretary said makes me feel better about the deal, unfortunately. I know it will come as a great surprise to him that I do not quite agree with it.

We learned earlier today about the 18-year prison term the former CEO of Anbang is now facing. There is a Yiddish proverb, "Never mind the remorse, don't commit the sin." If the Liberals do not commit the sin, there will be no reason for them to feel remorse a year from now if they approve the Aecon deal to then say that, in retrospect, they regret going through with it. That is exactly the type of regret the Australian government is feeling with the John Holland group takeover by the exact same state-owned company.

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We know from *The Globe and Mail* articles that have been written on this deal that officials within that department of the Government of Canada have said that this company would not be able to build the Gordie Howe International Bridge, and now Aecon has announced that it will be removing its intention to bid on the project. I ask the parliamentary secretary what other projects it will be removed from. Will it be dams, nuclear power plants, hospitals—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the supplementary question.

I can assure all Canadians that the decisions made under the act are based on extensive, detailed analyses. The government is following the process set out in the act and is making evidence-based decisions. We will not compromise Canada's national security for any foreign investment whatsoever. I can confirm that the proposed Aecon takeover is currently undergoing a national security review. However, the confidentiality provisions of the Investment Canada Act prevent me from sharing any details about it.

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "It's like putting a serial rapist in charge of a women's shelter." That is how one newspaper described the fact that Syria will chair a UN Conference on Disarmament later this year.

The Syrian regime, with the backing of Iran and Russia, is one of the world's leading violators of human rights in general and a violator in terms of the use of illegal weapons to violate human rights in particular. What is striking about this situation of the Syrian regime chairing this UN conference is that the UN's own investigations clearly show the illegal targeting of civilians with illegal chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. The fact that these attacks on civilians with chemical weapons have happened at all is a grave challenge to the credibility of the international system, so I am glad that there was a punitive response taken by our allies. The UN's investigative bodies have identified this and pointed the finger at Syria, yet at the same time, the UN is going to welcome Syria to chair the UN Conference on Disarmament, which operates under and reports to the UN General Assembly. The conference will meet starting May 28.

This is a pattern we see in different UN entities. Some of the worst violators of human rights in general, and in particular cases, will seek positions of influence involving human rights at the UN, the particular area where they are violating those rights, in hopes of preventing, or at least dampening, criticism of their own activities. We saw this, for example, with the Saudi government getting a position on the UN women's rights commission. We should acknowledge that there have been some changes made in Saudi Arabia, but there is a heck of a lot more work to do when it comes to women's rights and other human rights issues.

At the time, I asked our Minister of Foreign Affairs what I think was a fairly simple question. Did she think it was a good thing or a bad thing that Saudi Arabia was on the UN women's rights

commission? I asked the question multiple times. Her response was to explain some of the context around this election but not to actually answer the specific question.

I know that all members of this House believe that the UN plays an important role in the world, but I want to say to the government that appropriate criticism of that pattern of behaviour, of the way some authoritarian regimes use UN human rights bodies to try to whitewash their own abuses, is the pro-UN thing to do. If one cares about the UN, if one cares about the integrity of international institutions, it is necessary to speak out and criticize and act when we have these kinds of negative outcomes. It is with an eye to reforming and improving the UN to make it better that we should clearly identify when these perverse outcomes happen. Being pro-UN does not mean accepting these kinds of clearly unacceptable aspects of current processes as having to be in place going forward.

I want to ask the government this question again, because I do not think we got a clear answer originally. We heard comments about the situation in Syria in general.

The government had notice of this question, so it knows it is coming. Will it be boycotting this conference, given that Canada in the past has boycotted this conference when it has been chaired by rogue states? Will Canada do the right thing on May 28, and going forward, and boycott a disarmament conference chaired by Syria?

• (1745)

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I want to thank my hon. colleague for his passion and advocacy for human rights.

Our government is dismayed and appalled that Syria will take on the presidency of the conference on disarmament. We believe that it is inappropriate for Syria to take this presidency. Almost three weeks ago, when the ministers of foreign affairs of the G7 met in Toronto, a conversation on this matter was initiated by our Minister of Foreign Affairs. I will quote the communiqué that came out of the G7 conference. It states, "We deplore the fact that Syria will assume the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in May, given its consistent and flagrant disregard of international non-proliferation and disarmament norms and agreements."

We will continue to publicly denounce this development. We have been calling on the conference to change its rules of procedure to prevent countries which violate their disarmament obligations from holding the rotating presidency. We also call on countries to voluntarily recuse themselves when they know that they have not been upholding their international obligations.

I want to assure the hon. member that our government is seized of this issue and we have been publicly and diplomatically raising it with our allies, like-minded countries, and members of the UN.

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I also want to make a distinction. We, of course, know that the UN can work better and we want to see the UN improve and reform itself, but there is a difference between raising cynicism about the institution and constructively contributing to reforming the UN, and that is where I see the difference between me and my colleague.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives raised this issue not to create cynicism but to point to the reality, and people are going to respond to that reality in different ways. My hope is that this leads to constructive action. Sometimes we have to be tough on international institutions, and that includes a willingness to boycott conferences that are clearly too compromised.

With all due respect to my colleague, he said some things that are worthwhile about the G7 communiqué, but he did not answer the specific question, which is this: If Syria remains in the presidency position, if these reforms do not happen as they are fortunately being sought, will Canada be willing to send a clear statement by boycotting that conference?

Asking Syria to voluntarily recuse itself from this discussion is not a realistic approach. Syria wants to be in this discussion precisely because it wants to view criticism of its own record.

I ask the parliamentary secretary to answer this question: Will Canada be willing to boycott the convention if change does not happen?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind my colleague of the phrase, "Don't confuse politeness with weakness". He defines toughness with being vulgar or belligerent. My definition of toughness is being constructive, clear, and sometimes blunt, but in a constructive way.

As to his question about what we will do, he will understand that we will keep our options open. We are not going to reveal our options until the time comes. For now, we have been very clear about calling on Syria not to take the presidency, asking our allies to support that, and asking the conference to reform itself.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rose in the House in February to ask this government to reassure the provinces and municipalities about its infrastructure plan and the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities recently gave an update on the first phase, but I have to say that I still do not feel reassured.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer reported in March that half of the infrastructure money set aside for the first phase had not been spent or even allocated. The minister, meanwhile, claims that nearly 80% of the money has been spent. That still leaves 20% unspent, which amounts to \$2.6 billion in unused funding.

A recent article in the magazine *L'actualité* reported the following:

The provinces want Ottawa to give them more flexibility for spending federal funding, especially the ability to replace part of their own contributions with federal money.

In my riding, one project that is vital for the economy and for businesses in Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale is the one to build a multi-level rail bridge to replace the current grade crossing on the Trans-Canada Highway. Yes, we have a railroad crossing the Trans-Canada Highway at grade.

The Quebec department of transport, sustainable mobility, and transport electrification confirmed early this year that this is a priority project, but it currently does not fit into any federal grant programs.

Last Monday, I hosted the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in my riding. For me, Saint-Hyacinthe is a must-see, which is why, to kick off its cross-Canada tour, the committee made its first stop at Jefo, a company that has been working in the field of feed additives for 35 years now.

From the very beginning, Jean Fontaine, and now the next generation, have always seized opportunities and developed a vision that benefits the agricultural producers in our region and around the world, since Jefo has operations everywhere there is agriculture.

The visit to the Jefo facility really opened our eyes to the enterprise's importance in the field of animal nutrition. During the visit, Jean Fontaine and Jean-François Fontaine made it very clear that their plans for expanding Jefo are certainly not complete.

I am proud that Saint-Hyacinthe continues to make its mark as an agrifood technopole thanks to one of its businesses, Jefo, which is the only private company in Quebec to offer a capacity of 100 train units, in or out, as we were told by its president, Jean Fontaine.

Another thing that Jean Fontaine and Jean-François Fontaine wanted to talk to us about was how much the development and expansion of Jefo and other businesses in my riding depend on plans to replace the current grade crossing that crosses the Trans-Canada Highway with a multi-level rail bridge.

Not only is this project crucial to the safety of everyone in the region, but it also represents a key asset for the economic development of Saint-Hyacinthe and the surrounding area.

Since I was elected, I have had dozens of meetings with my federal, provincial, and municipal colleagues, as well as representatives from Canadian National, to try to bring this project to fruition. My point here is that it is important to listen to the provinces, which are asking for more flexibility in terms of how federal subsidies can be invested.

Will this government give the provinces and municipalities the flexibility they are asking for to decide which infrastructure projects are important to their communities?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her new role as infrastructure critic. I am a bit behind in congratulating her, so this role is not necessarily new, but since she is from a so-called new party that is not actually new, my congratulations may still be relevant.

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I would like to respond directly to my colleague's question. Our \$180-billion investment in infrastructure was historic. This investment was double the amount that was previously invested in infrastructure. It will allow for transformative projects to be done in conjunction with provinces and municipalities, and we will respect their jurisdictions and priorities. My colleague knows that, with respect to the traditional funding streams, the provinces are primarily responsible for setting priorities, whether this is done in the first phase or second phase of our infrastructure plan. The provinces are responsible for carefully reviewing the projects, since their ministries have the expertise needed to assess and carry out the projects.

It is therefore very easy for me to stand here today and confirm that, indeed, we will be respecting the jurisdictions of the provinces and territories and of indigenous peoples. This is a priority. This is what we said during our election campaign, and this is a promise that we are fulfilling.

• (1755)

[English]

This is an important aspect of our infrastructure plan and investing in Canada plan. The respective provincial jurisdictions and their priorities are at the heart of the bilateral agreements we are currently negotiating, seven of which have been positively concluded to date, with the remaining in the final stages. It is precisely for that reason we have taken our time to negotiate in good faith with provinces and territories, ensuring there is flexibility where it is necessary for provinces to invest.

At the same time, it is important to remember, because it is an important part of our investment plan, we are asking provinces and municipalities to put up money as well. Their needs and prioritizations with respect to capital investments, as well as their five-year and 10-year plans, need to be examined and then negotiated. I am very happy to announce that we have concluded the majority of them to date.

When it comes to the question of my hon. colleague about the Infrastructure Bank, again, it is important to reiterate that this is an optional tool that will see us investing \$35 billion from the federal government into projects that generate revenue, in tandem and in co-operation with private capital so we deploy and invest in those assets now, where and when it is needed.

It is with great pleasure that I stand here to remind and confirm for the member opposite that respect of the provinces and other priorities

is top of mind and is key to ensuring these assets are properly deployed and invested in.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, people's expectations tend to run pretty high when they hear about historic, \$180-billion investments.

I represent 25 municipalities who now have very high expectations after hearing that announcement. They have a very clear picture of the infrastructure they need and the existing infrastructure they would like to upgrade. They have projects for the next 10 years. The same goes for the provinces. They have their five-year plans and they know exactly what they need. Their needs go beyond what the federal government can offer them each year, in fact.

That is why municipalities are asking for funding that is as predictable as other funding models such as the gas tax, so that they can plan ahead. They also need funding that will help the smaller towns as much as the bigger cities. I sincerely hope that all of these agreements with all—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that infrastructure across the country was underfunded for at least the past 10 years. We announced this transformative plan to invest \$180 billion to build Canada for the 21st century. It is a very ambitious plan and expectations are high, but we are investing the necessary funding.

I am very proud to confirm that municipalities that have been waiting for about 10 years to renovate their community centre or upgrade their wastewater treatment system are now seeing their applications for funding approved. I am very proud to talk to mayors of small towns that do not have money to invest in their infrastructure and who have received confirmation that they will be getting funding from the federal government. I look forward to making announcements with my colleague in her riding.

• (1800)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6 p.m.)

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