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Monday, April 8, 2019

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 8, 2019

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

NATIONAL PHYSICIANS' DAY

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.) moved that Bill S-248, an act respecting national physicians' day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs for seconding this bill.

It is a pleasure to stand here to speak to a very simple, short, one-line bill, which says that we would like to name May 1 as “national physicians' day”. Why would it be the first of May? It is because May 1 was the birth of the first female physician, in the 1800s. She graduated in New York and came to live here because she was a Canadian woman from Toronto. Her name was Dr. Emily Stowe. She was not able to study here, so she had to go to New York to get her medical degree. Therefore, the medical profession would like her birthday to be the day that we celebrate national physicians' day.

Not only did Dr. Emily Stowe come back here to become a very prominent suffragette, but she also helped to create what we now call the Women's College Hospital, so that women, unlike herself, could now study in Canada. That is one of the reasons we are naming it national physicians' day on May 1, because of Emily Stowe.

However, I want to talk about why there should be a physicians' day. I am a physician. I studied medicine in Dublin, Ireland. I came to live here in Canada. I practised medicine for 23 years, delivering over 800 babies. That was a remarkably wondrous time in my career, because I loved delivering babies. I loved getting up at two o'clock in the morning and rushing out to deliver a baby. It was always a great feeling, but sometimes it was not.

Sometimes babies were born with problems. That was really hard, after working with a mother for nine months, to get to the point of knowing what she was facing with the birth of her child. Physicians do that every day. They see that people get sick. Sometimes we cannot help people. All in all, that is how physicians spend their

days. I do not think there is anybody in this place who has not at some time or another seen a physician.

For me, being a physician was a remarkable time in my life. However, I want to point out how many physicians not only look after patients to try to prevent them from getting sick, but also look after patients when they are dying or going through difficulties with Alzheimer's disease. That is what physicians do.

There are still physicians in this country who are making house calls. There are about a million house calls a day in this country made by physicians. It was something that I liked to do, because I got to visit my patient's house. I saw the way that they lived, and it helped me to understand better what was going on in their lives.

As physicians, we are not only involved in healing the sick, helping people to get better and preventing people from getting ill, but advocacy is a major thing for physicians. When I was a member of the British Columbia medical association, we worked really hard to get infant seat restraints. We pulled all kinds of stunts to get the government of British Columbia to enforce them. In fact, we had a poster that said, “Did you belt your kid today?”, and there was a Canadian seatbelt sitting in his or her little chair. We also worked hard to get people to wear bicycle helmets. We were again trying to make people take notice. There was someone riding a bicycle with a watermelon that fell off and splattered, and it said, “You have to wear a helmet. Protect your melon.”

There are all kinds of things that one had to do as a physician to move that agenda forward, to try to speak for patients. Many times patients are vulnerable and do not have a voice to speak for themselves. This, for me, is the essence of being a physician. It is not just studying for seven years and then doing two years of residency and finally practising medicine. I knew all about the science of medicine, but it is my patients who taught me the art of medicine. It is my patients who helped me to understand what being a physician was really about. It is going to bat for your patients and trying to get the best for them. Considering the best interests of your patients is one of the things that we believe in as physicians.

Then, of course, my patients also taught me. Patients taught me not to judge them but rather to help and do my best for them, regardless of my religious or moral beliefs. It was not about that; it was about doing the best for my patients. It was to support them through all of their decision-making to help make their lives better.

Private Members' Business

As a family doctor, it was about getting to know the patient's family. It was about making sure that we knew that the family itself was at the heart of what made the patient tick, what made the patient who he or she was. Sometimes when we were trying to deal with a patient's ailment, we had to deal with the family. We had to look at the family dynamics. We had to do the kind of stuff that we never think physicians have to do.

That is why I want to talk about some physicians I know very well in British Columbia, who have put themselves on the line. They do not get paid for it, but they push hard. I want to talk about Dr. Julio Montaner, from the Downtown Eastside, where he has worked with people who are addicted, who have overdosed and who have HIV-AIDS or hepatitis C. All of those people that the world tends to forget or are judgmental about, he has put himself on the line for, pushing for those things.

Dr. Jerilynn Prior, who is a friend of mine and a colleague, at one time pushed for women to take folic acid so that their children would not be born with spinal injuries. Today, she is pushing for dying with dignity, as she herself is in a wheelchair with an intractable disease.

I could go on and on about all of the things that physicians do other than just looking at us when we are sick.

I know how many funerals I have attended as a physician, how many births and many marriages. I know how many women have called me in the middle of the night because they were scared. They were locked in their bathroom because their husband was outside screaming at them with a baseball bat because he had come home after drinking too much. Sometimes, I have found them places to keep them safe.

For me, this is what a physician is about. Therefore, we are asking for everyone in this House to support the concept that on one day in the year we celebrate physicians for the work they do, their integration into our families and lives, and to ensure that this country has physicians. Family physicians take care of about three-quarters of patients and their needs.

We talk about gender equality a lot in this House. Two-thirds of family physicians are women. We now see them enrolling in university to study medicine and graduating across the board as specialists and the like. In fact, we now have about 45% of women who are physicians. Therefore, we have come full circle, in talking about how being a physician is really important, how many of us depend on physicians when we are helpless or in need and the trust that we put in physicians. Being a doctor is one of the most-trusted professions in the world. I think that this tells of the relationship we want to celebrate when we talk about physicians' day on May 1.

Therefore, I hope I can get support from this whole House to designate May 1—and perhaps, because I know it is just around the corner, this coming May 1—as the day we stand in this House to declare the very first national physicians' day.

• (1110)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be able to participate in today's discussion, as it is less of a debate, I believe.

As noted, Dr. Emily Stowe was Canada's first female physician. Obviously, this day and notation in Canadian history is important, not only for physicians but also for the women's suffrage movement. Dr. Stowe was well versed and capable. However, she had to get her medical accreditation in the United States before it was accepted later on here in Canada.

I would like to ask my colleague this. What does her government intend to do to help budget for some fairly robust education and discussion with respect to improving the lives of women in Canadian society? Her case is one of unfinished business. According to the member's discussion this morning, we still have women coming to doctors who are physically abused by men. Dr. Emily Stowe pushed for the women's movements on voting and inclusion. I think it would be appropriate that the government include some resources to educate Canadians about this important day, which we will hopefully recognize.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, educating Canadians about the importance of women in medicine and the work that Dr. Emily Stowe did are important parts of what we are hoping to bring to the fore when we talk about May 1, which was Emily Stowe's birthday. Today, over 60% who are enrolling in medical school are women. We see that 50% of family doctors are women, over 45% of those going into medical specialties are women.

Women bring a very different perspective to practising medicine. They bring a humanity to it, which male colleagues do as well, but women see the world from a different perspective. There is a joke that there are more women patients than men, and so women understand what it is like to be a patient. They understand the needs of the patient better.

I am hoping that as we talk about Emily Stowe, we are talking about the fact that physicians are not just healers or there to prevent us from getting sick, but they are probably the best advocates we can have for those in poverty, the vulnerable and those whom society shuns. All of my physician colleagues go to bat on these issues. They do not get paid for it, but they do so because they know that it is important for the well-being of society and the patient.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as there are many Dr. Wongs in my family, I recognize that the bill before us is a great move.

As society in our nation is aging, and as a former minister for seniors, I care about the health of seniors and the need for more doctors. It is difficult to even find family doctors now. I have finally found a much younger family doctor than me, and by the time she retires, I may still be alive. I need that.

My question is about foreign credential recognition. As the member mentioned, even the person we are honouring right now did not get her credentials from the United States recognized here.

Looking at the multicultural demographics, we are aging together and we need a lot of physicians. What is the government doing about foreign recognition for physicians who are trained overseas?

Private Members' Business

•(1115)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that my colleague asked that question. Under a former Liberal government, it was my duty to look at the barriers that stood in the way of people who trained in foreign countries coming here to practise medicine.

Fortunately, or unfortunately in some cases, it is out of our hands, as the colleges set the criteria for how a physician is trained and what training is needed. First, a person would have to pass the board exams when coming to this country, so that the college can verify they are fit to practise medicine here.

There is also the issue of speaking the language well. Being a physician does not mean just saying hello and how are you in English or French and nothing else. The intricacy of the relationship between the patient and the physician requires good language skills. Under that Liberal government, this was something we had put money into. I understand that money is still there. There was over \$20 million for what we call “advanced language training”.

Of course, people also need to find a practice here. Therefore, we were looking at how we could get them into clinics where they could train for about four months, to understand how Canadians practise medicine and what the ethics and rules are. This is a very important thing.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for introducing this bill in the House.

When the member was giving her speech about the care by doctors, I was reminded of Dr. Kara Laing, who attended to my wife when she was sick with cancer in early 2000. Dr. Laing was special. She would always make a point of asking how I was, how our son was. To the point that the member mentioned, she showed up to the funeral home to make sure we were all okay.

Recognizing physicians is a great thing to do, but I wonder if the member could explain what we should be doing more of in order to attract physicians to the rural areas of our country.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has asked an important question. One reason physicians do not want to go to rural areas is that it is difficult to get replacements, so they are on call literally 24/7 and cannot leave. As we know, every year physicians have to upgrade their skills. They have to have continuing medical education, because things change rapidly in the care of patients. Almost every three months, something new is going on. That is one of the problems. As well, they want to be able to send their children to university, and sometimes they want something close by, which is not always possible.

Some provinces are trying to use incentives to help physicians stay there. They are trying to get people to take over when they need to leave to continue their medical education, and they are trying to allow them to get support from tertiary care centres through telemedicine. A lot of that is happening, which is going to help people.

A lot of young people do not seem to want to go into medicine anymore, mainly because of the hours, the stress and the time to have interpersonal relationships with patients, which demands a lot of emotional strength and support. We are hearing that physicians are rapidly burning out.

I hope people who are listening to this debate will say that they want their kids to be physicians one day and maybe start bellying up to the bar to do that kind of thing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we begin our week, I am pleased to speak to Bill S-248, an act respecting national physicians’ day. My Conservative colleagues and I support this bill.

Physicians are a crucial part of our health and social services network. They lead medical teams and take on a lot of responsibility. When it comes to doctors, people have very high expectations. Many doctors are leaders. The people of my wonderful riding, Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, are fortunate to have been inspired by a number of doctors, including Dr. Stanley Vollant while he was with general surgery services at the Chicoutimi health and social services centre.

Dr. Vollant is a deeply compassionate person. I know him very well and enjoyed many conversations with him while I was working in Baie-Comeau. He is the first indigenous surgeon in Quebec and the second in Canada. In 2010, he began the *Innu Meshkenu*, a 6,000-kilometre trek along the trails trodden by his ancestors, to share his message of hope and perseverance with young indigenous people.

He reminds us that we must invest to develop the full potential of young people so that they never give up on their dreams. He believes that a large part of the health care budget should go toward education. Through his words and his actions, he is sharing a message of pride in indigenous culture and of the importance of staying in school and adopting a healthy lifestyle.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the participation of the Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec in the Grand défi Pierre Lavoie, a man from my riding, and Dr. Dominic Gagnon’s determined promotion of healthy living. The Grand défi Pierre Lavoie is a 1,000-kilometre cycling marathon over 60 continuous hours from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean to Montreal to promote healthy living.

The Grand défi Pierre Lavoie also funds a foundation by the same name, which seeks to develop, support and promote any activity that encourages people, particularly youth, to adopt a more active lifestyle. Physical activity is a great way to prevent many major diseases. The aging population and the rise in obesity will impact social services and health. I join with the foundation in stating that curative care is just one part of the solution. Prevention is the other.

The benefits of a healthy lifestyle are not simply limited to weight management. They play an important role in the prevention of certain cancers and cardiovascular diseases, stress management, and fostering well-being and self-esteem as well as the ability to focus and learn.

Private Members' Business

Working in health care is becoming increasingly complex. We need the leadership of doctors. I appreciate and acknowledge the leadership of my colleague from Simcoe—Grey. She is a pediatric orthopaedic surgeon and a parliamentarian. She continued to practice medicine while an MP. She did not hesitate to go to Nepal in 2015, not as a government representative but to offer her know-how in an effort to help the victims of recent earthquakes.

As I was saying, there have been many changes in medicine, especially technological changes. Could the use of artificial intelligence ultimately eliminate the radiology profession? Scientific research improves treatment effectiveness. Then there are social changes. Canada has an aging population. One in four people will soon be a senior. Health care, like so many other fields, is grappling with a labour shortage. There is also a shift in ethics. On June 17, 2016, Canada passed legislation on medical assistance in dying. There are physical changes. Bacteria are increasingly resistant to antibiotics.

When we recognize the contribution of doctors and their leadership, we also recognize the work of all stakeholders in the health sector.

• (1120)

These changes underscore the importance of teamwork and greater responsibility and knowledge sharing. In health care, every person has a role to play. Everyone contributes.

This bill would designate May 1 as national physicians' day. During the week of May 12, we honour nurses for the work they do. As team leaders, physicians have to deal with a lot of pressure and meet numerous modern-day challenges.

Canada's emergency rooms are often full to bursting, and patients can spend a long time waiting. Because of the aging population, our communities' needs are growing, especially the need for palliative care. More and more Canadians are requesting medical assistance in dying. Physicians are running up against "Dr. Google" as patients research their symptoms online to come up with their own diagnoses. The Internet and misinformation also increase the pressure on physicians. The World Health Organization lists vaccine hesitancy as one of the top 10 threats to world health in 2019. People are more afraid of the vaccines themselves than the diseases. Anthropologist Heidi J. Larson, an expert in risk science at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, warns that the next major outbreak could be caused by misinformation. Some people also believe that doctors are paid too much. The media attacks doctors for salary increases granted by the Quebec government. Changes made to the tax system during this Parliament have penalized doctors, unfairly tarring them with the same brush as taxpayers who use aggressive tax planning.

Incidentally, these tax changes also threaten the forestry co-operatives that are so common in the regions of Quebec.

This can upset the fiscal balance relative to that of the United States. We need to show greater support for our physicians, so they are less inclined to go and practise their profession in the U.S.

The professional oath of the Collège des médecins du Québec stipulates that physicians must discharge their professional obligations towards all patients with competence, integrity and loyalty.

Their professional conduct must comply with the principles of the code of ethics. They must be loyal to their profession and respect their colleagues, and always behave in keeping with the honour and dignity of the profession.

The member for Markham—Stouffville did not want to leave her position at Treasury Board. She was even more upset when she was kicked out of the Liberal caucus. Some members have publicly accused her of disloyalty. She was the victim of attacks based on inaccuracies and falsehoods. As a physician and an MP, she aimed to improve the lives of Canadians. She upheld her fundamental values, her ethical responsibilities and her obligations. Now she is paying dearly for that.

This government definitely needs to recognize national physicians' day. These individuals are true community leaders. Many of them are very involved in their communities. They are economic drivers in smaller communities and, more importantly, they save lives.

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise on Bill S-248, an act respecting national physicians' day.

May 1 would be recognized as national physicians' day. It would be done in memory, which is important for this discussion, of Dr. Emily Stowe, who has been declared one of Canada's heroes. She not only advocated for women's rights but patient rights and the women's movement in general. For her to do this type of trail-blazing was nothing short of incredible. In fact, this bill's having its day on her birthday is very significant and I am quite honoured to talk about that, because the two very much go together.

When we think of how physicians assist patients unconditionally every single day in our society, what they contribute, the difference they make in society and the repercussions of it, whether it be an injury, a workplace accident or violence against people, they see men, women, neighbours, family members, colleagues and fellow citizens from coast to coast to coast and deal with the ramifications, be they health issues that naturally occur because of body changes, repercussions related to the environments people are exposed to, accidents or violence perpetrated against them.

I can speak to the humility of these individuals. I am a PSW, personal support worker, and have experienced some of my most humbling moments while assisting people in vulnerable states, being the last person they see or the only person available to them to get information and try to assist. It can involve things as simple as medication or much more significant things relating to infections and other problems. I would be remiss if we did not talk about the mental health requirements, not only for this occupation but for what doctors deal with in the general population.

Private Members' Business

Dr. Stowe was an interesting case with regard to Canadian society. To this day, there has not been any type of resolution to equality of any significance. Women still receive less pay than their male counterparts. Women are still subjected to higher rates of violence. Women are still under-represented on corporate boards, not-for-profit organizations and professions. Dr. Stowe actually had to go beyond our borders to make a difference in our country, which, in some respects, sadly, is the case even to this day.

As an example, Dr. Stowe went to the United States to get her medical credentials and professional training, only to return to Canada to have her credentials denied. She fought and eventually had them recognized as part of her accreditation. Ontario and Nova Scotia have already recognized her contributions. As part of her legacy and as a role model for others in our country, she subsequently went on to work within the women's movement for the right to vote. She became involved in the suffrage movement, which is so important to the national fabric of our country.

This is unfinished business for Canadian society, even today. This legislation would ensure there is a connection between the two in terms of family physicians. Dr. Stowe is very important because there is undoubtedly a connection that should be acknowledged and celebrated and it should be on May 1 that we recognize we need to continue to work on that unfinished business.

Family physicians and other specialized physicians mark our communities very much and in many ways. One could argue that as Canada was settled as a nation, their very presence formed civil societies because of their consistency in being able to serve, whether it was in preventing diseases or assisting individuals with issues related to infections, injuries or birthing. All those different things created the centerpiece for many of our now urban cities. Most importantly, it continues today within our civilization, even as we struggle as a country to continue to provide those services.

● (1130)

It is amazing to think about the long hours that physicians put in as well as the time they give up for themselves, their personal interests and their family members. I am someone who has had the benefit of having a family doctor. Dr. Albert Ng is mine. His father, Edward Ng, was someone who had my grandfather as a patient. I am very grateful to have that privilege to be able to get that type of medical attention, when necessary. It is important to note that many parts of Canada still struggle with this, so hopefully that will be part of this discussion.

As a New Democrat, I can tell the House that it is the unfinished business of Tommy Douglas to have a pharmacare program. However, having accessible and affordable treatment and medical attention is the core principle of where we stand politically, and more importantly, where we should go. That is how we build a strong economy and strong communities, as well as how we better ourselves as individuals.

We know that right now there are many issues in many communities. For example, we could designate a day for mental health. There are other types of addictions and modern society problems, and our physicians are the front-line people who must serve under those conditions. There are many individuals who suffer from these types of different illnesses, and some occur so often that

they have become routine in physicians' eyes. However, there are new issues that arise, such as issues related to environmental contaminants in human health, accidents that cause exposure to toxicities as well as a number of different things. Some physicians not only deal with these issues in our own country but go to other countries to help individuals in need. These physicians understand that the human need extends beyond our borders. Canada's contributions are well known and it is something that makes us proud.

If we look at our public policies, one of the most underutilized aspects of our contributions internationally is the DART program, or the disaster assistance response team that is able to go to different jurisdictions. It is an area where we could do much better and it could be used to help in many areas of the world.

In our country, there are physicians who contribute so much and in different ways, and often they are families. In Windsor, there are the Bernstein brothers, one was an orthopaedic surgeon and the other an ophthalmologist. They served patients even into their eighties and made very significant contributions to the community. There are others who serve people and then go on to work as hospital administrators or on developing policies regarding medicines. For example, I think of Edward Ng from my area, who was a physician who went on to help organize the administration practices of very critical medical procedures with regard to the use of spending public money and getting the most out of our dollars. I do not believe that is unusual in places like Windsor, which has large service provisions that undergo changes over the years.

Again, May 1 would be a recognition of the complexities physicians deal with in our society, and not just in regard to treating people. For example, looking again at Dr. Stowe and her contributions, we know that they were very complex. She had a determination to serve people despite the fact that society shunned her for being a female. She was shunned from a profession that was said to be only for males. She had to leave this country to get the accreditation to do the work and then she had to come back and fight for those rights.

● (1135)

These are our men and women who are serving as physicians in our country right now. When we look at the situation with the opioid epidemic, which we believe is a national crisis and needs a national response, often we leave it solely on the shoulders of health care providers to deal with this in a piecemeal way, as opposed to looking at the complex civil society response that is necessary, with the supports for longer treatment. Often our men and women who are physicians end up being the ones who are at the front line.

I conclude by thanking our physicians. May 1 is appropriate because of Dr. Stowe. I want to thank all those participating in making this a day we can celebrate in the future.

Private Members' Business

●(1140)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to a very important piece of legislation, introduced by my friend and colleague from Vancouver Centre, recognizing the important role that our physicians play in today's society.

As has been mentioned by the three previous speakers, this bill has two, possibly three parts. The first pays tribute to Dr. Emily Stowe, an individual who led the way on many fronts. She was a physician, and prior to being a physician, she was involved and played a very strong leadership role. According to my minimal research, she was the first female principal in the area of Upper Canada. This would only lead one to believe that she was a pioneer. She went on to become a practising physician.

What intrigued me was the fact that she opened up her clinic in Toronto in the year of Canada's Confederation, 1867. There is no doubt she was a pioneer. One can only imagine the level of difficulty, at the best of times, for women back then to get into university and the types of barriers that were in place.

I can genuinely appreciate the significance of making May 1 that designated day. It is the day that Dr. Emily Stowe was born. When I first heard about the legislation and the acknowledgement of May 1, I was a bit curious as to why it was May 1. That curiosity has been answered and I could not think of a more appropriate day, given the history of Dr. Emily Stowe. I would suggest that those who might be following, not just to leave it at that but to look into it and do a bit of background. Dr. Stowe was an incredible individual, a true pioneer and no doubt has inspired many women to advance to where we are today. We owe her a great deal of gratitude.

Getting on to national physicians' day itself, recognizing our physicians is something that holds a great deal of merit. I used to be the health critic for the Province of Manitoba. In that capacity, I had the opportunity to meet with numerous doctors. Some doctors were specialists, some general, some were rural, some urban, but there was no doubt that the common theme was the love for what they were doing. In many ways, as has already been alluded to, our medical professionals, in particular our doctors, have their hearts in the right place in terms of wanting to make society a better place for all of us.

We could talk about the micro, the individual patient and the quality of care that is provided, or the macro issue of advocacy. That is something I also want to make some reference to. We all know that "There but for the grace of God" walk us all, in the sense that at any point in time something could happen to us. We know and feel confident in our system that we are going to get the attention that is needed from our doctors. The doctor is the one who truly cares and wants to be able to get us in a better health condition.

There is a great deal of faith in our doctors as a profession. When we talk about different professions and level of respect from the public as a whole, we always find that doctors are somewhere near the top, if not at the top, compared with, let us say, used car sales people or something of that nature. There is a great deal of understanding and respect toward the medical profession. Individuals at that micro-level are very attached to their doctors and have

faith their doctors and want to be able to have that relationship because they understand and appreciate the importance of good health.

●(1145)

In the bigger picture, the advocacy role that doctors play in society is done in many different ways. When I was the health care critic, we would sit down with doctors and talk about our tertiary health care facilities, our community health facilities and in-home care. As the member for Vancouver Centre pointed out, we still have doctors who go to homes. I do not think people necessarily realize that is the case.

It could be sitting around a boardroom table with doctors to talk about the future of a particular health care facility or it could be talking to doctors about where there is potential growth in regard to health care services such as community clinics, or even that one-on-one aspect, and it goes beyond that to international Doctors Without Borders and the fine work they do.

Last summer, I had the opportunity to travel with a parliamentary friendship group to the Philippines. The member for Simcoe—Grey also went there earlier with a committee and offered her services at a local hospital facility. It was exceptionally well received.

My colleague from Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley has done fine work on the international scene. Previous speakers have talked about other contributions, such as Canada's DART missions. There is no doubt that our doctors, who are trained and perform well, play a very strong international leadership role. Canada's doctors have a reputation for the fine work that they do.

Going back to the national perspective, we have organizations and umbrella groups. Dr. Osler, one of the doctors that I see, is representative of doctors across Canada who make sure there is a strong voice in important issues such as advocacy. A good example of that would be the pharmacare program, as the current government is moving more and more toward having some sort of a national pharmacare program. After a couple of consecutive budgets, we are seeing a more tangible commitment, and some of the strongest advocacy for that policy comes from our doctors.

At one point we had very strong pressure coming in terms of the universality of health care. I go to the Seven Oaks General Hospital in an area I represent. It serves the north end of Winnipeg as a community hospital facility. It has been the doctors in good part who have provided education to many individuals, myself included, to become advocates for that health care facility.

Whether it is an advocacy role at the macro level, from an international perspective to a national perspective to the local community perspective, doctors are there in a very real and tangible way, making a difference. In the years ahead, this is going to be even more important.

We know that Canadians love our national health care system, which is administered at the provincial level, and they believe in it. For our health care system to succeed, doctors need to continue to be empowered to play that important advocacy role, because it is all about the care of the patient, no matter where that patient might be.

Private Members' Business

• (1150)

I am thankful for the opportunity to share a few thoughts on the importance of our doctors in Canada.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after spending eight years in elected politics, including serving in cabinet and running for the Conservative leadership, I will say that I first and foremost always define myself as a physician, a role that I will be returning to full time at the end of this year when I leave this place.

When people ask me what I do for a living, I always say that I am a pediatric orthopaedic surgeon, a doctor who gets to take kids who cannot play on the playground and let them play again, so it gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill S-248, an act respecting national physicians' day. This act would declare each May 1 national physicians' day.

Children's health has been the primary focus of my medical career, and it was one of the main reasons I ran for office. When asked in 2006 by then minister Jim Flaherty to chair the expert panel on the children's fitness tax credit, I was able to see first-hand how I could have a positive impact on the health of thousands of children via good public policy, not just one child at a time in a clinic. A tax credit to support healthy activities for kids and make activities more affordable for their parents was an innovative idea. It was a welcome idea.

Along with the reduction in the GST, I have heard from many people that this is the most popular and most memorable tax credit of the former government. Not only was it popular, but it was a success. Over 2.8 million children as of 2014 had taken advantage of it. The children's fitness tax credit was so successful that the only criticisms of were that it was not enough and that low-income families should receive a subsidy. In 2014, Conservatives made these changes to reflect what Canadians wanted and deserved.

The success and popularity of the tax credit made it even more puzzling why the Liberals promised to kill it in the 2015 election. Unfortunately, the Liberals kept that promise, reducing it in 2016 and eliminating it altogether in 2017.

One cold comfort is that in 2016, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute and other researchers compared Participaction's report card on physical activity for children and youth to 37 other countries in six continents. Canada's highest grade was for participation in organized activities. The report noted that Canada's rates were significantly higher than sports participation rates 10 years ago.

I know that the tax credit was the right policy to help make Canadian kids healthier and for parents struggling to afford sports, so earlier this year I travelled across the country to meet with parents. I wanted to talk to them about preventive health and what we could do to help get kids active.

I continuously heard from parents that they were upset that the tax credit for kids had been cut, so I went to work drafting a bill. On February 6, Bill C-428 was launched, with a website to promote it. I encourage people to go to healthykidshealthycanada.ca to support this initiative and bring back the children's fitness tax credit.

When I heard of the idea of a national physicians' day, I must say I had second thoughts about it. I wondered whether we should we have a day to honour doctors. Most physicians would say that every day it is a privilege to take care of people.

As an orthopaedic surgeon who takes care of kids, I spend my days helping children. Frankly, when children with cerebral palsy walk again for the first time, even with assistance, the joy in their mothers' eyes and their sense of accomplishment and their great smile mean that doctors feel there is no need to be honoured. They know they have played a role in making that happen.

As I looked more into the bill, I began to see why this proposal was being brought forward by Senator Eggleton, with the support of the Canadian Medical Association. A special note is the date, May 1, which marks the birthdate of Dr. Emily Stowe, born in 1831, which several of my colleagues have commented on. Dr. Stowe was the first female to practise medicine in Canada. She was also a pioneer of Canada's women's movement and is an idol for many young Canadian physicians now, particularly female ones.

A national physicians' day is also important because it highlights the role that doctors play in communities across Canada, as my colleagues have also mentioned.

For those who live in big cities, access to care is often taken for granted. However, we do know that in smaller communities, people may not even have a doctor. Those in the north would be lucky to have a nurse practitioner in their communities. Anything more complicated than a broken arm requires a flight to Yellowknife, Iqaluit or Whitehorse, or often a more southern destination.

In the northern parts of many provinces, a doctor may rotate from a southern centre, which is great, but it means that people do not have a family doctor, as they could possibly have in a bigger centre. I say "possibly" because millions of Canadians in communities all across the country lack a doctor.

• (1155)

When places like my community, Simcoe—Grey, lose a doctor in rural parts of the country as he or she retires, we go to great lengths and efforts to recruit a new one, and frequently we cannot. For many communities, the loss of a doctor is like the loss of the post office, the local grocery store or the local school. It is a turning point for a community, and not a good one.

Private Members' Business

The recognition of a national physician's day gives an opportunity to bring these issues to the forefront at least one day a year. It gives an opportunity to speak to the important roles that doctors play in our communities, of the need for quality care that is accountable and accessible to patients, the ability to talk about lineups and wait times or about how the government demands that everyone use one system and then is unwilling to innovate and change to provide reasonable access to care.

Part of this bargain, the unwritten relationship between citizens and the government that is providing health care, must be reasonable access to care in a reasonable time frame. Currently, this is not the case. This neglect is made worse by the stress that it causes to the patient and to the families of these patients.

I heal kids. There is nothing worse than watching a child suffer, but what the families of these children go through because of the challenges in our system is a really close second. It is frustrating for my colleagues and me to know that we are bound by all sorts of rules that limit our ability to take care of patients. In getting surgical time at a hospital or even opening a clinic, there are many problems.

Just this weekend a colleague of mine, Dr. Smith from Windsor, an anaesthetist, said that the system is broken. The patients know it and the families know it. Why are the politicians and their colleagues afraid to change it?

I heard concerns like this across the country when I was conducting consultations on modernizing the Canada Health Act. Similar views were reflected in reports by Liberal senator Michael Kirby and former NDP premier Roy Romanow about how unaccountable the system has become to Canadians, how out of touch and bureaucratic it is and how the user, the patient, is often the last person of concern.

We need to listen to doctors when they use their collective voices to speak out on issues of national importance. We need to listen when they say that the system is broken, which is exactly what our patients are saying to us every day when they come to a clinic. There needs to be a revolutionary change in our health care system. The Canada Health Act needs to be modernized so that we can provide high-quality care for Canadians, the care they expect and deserve.

Interestingly, one of the most recent and most vocal examples of doctors speaking out was not medically related. It was related to their role as small business owners. Yes, I am talking about the recent tax changes to small businesses that the government introduced. Many Canadians learned during the whole affair that the overwhelming majority of doctors in Canada are small business owners. We are not government employees, which is what the majority of people believe. This misconception is largely owed to the Canada Health Act, which makes people believe that doctors are government employees, but we are not. We are small business owners who have a large amount of overhead and we have to pay for it ourselves. The same expensive equipment that is seen in a hospital we have often have to buy for our clinics. This equipment is not cheap, and it needs to be regularly updated.

Doctors are also substantial employers. Even the smallest doctor's office provides two jobs: an administrative assistant and a nurse. Most provide more, including a scheduler, an office manager and

other nurses. A large doctor's office has more full-time jobs than a local café or a small clothing store. These investments in our communities are the reasons Canadians witnessed the negative reaction to the proposed tax changes. Doctors took it as an insult to be called tax cheats by the Liberal government. To be accused of taking advantage of a system by Liberal politicians was a bit much.

Each and every day it is an honour to be a pediatric orthopaedic surgeon. I have an amazing job and I help kids get back on the playground to play. My colleagues and I do not need a day to honour us. However, if a national physician's day can help bring attention to the doctor shortages that Canadians face, to small towns losing their only physician, to the lack of accountability in the health system, to the present model of health care that forces patients into a system where they are simply neglected or to the unfair tax changes that have done nothing more than chase doctors out of this country, then a national physician's day is worthwhile. I am pleased to lend my support to this legislation.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell has two minutes to begin his speech. He will certainly have the opportunity to finish his speech another time.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here to speak to Bill S-248, an act respecting national physicians' day.

I would like to begin by commending the Hon. Art Eggleton for introducing this bill in the other place prior to his retirement, as well as the member for Vancouver Centre for sponsoring it in the House.

Bill S-248 seeks to designate May 1 of each year as national physicians' day in honour of the vital role that physicians play in caring for patients and in supporting the health and well-being of Canadians.

A variety of commemorative periods already exist to recognize the contribution of health professionals, such as Family Doctor Week, Oncology Nursing Day, National Physiotherapy Month and Paramedic Service Week. However, these commemorative periods were not proclaimed by a legislative initiative, but were designated through an annual declaration by the Minister of Health.

The approach of this bill to proclaim a national day through legislation for a health care professional is a novel one. As was stated during the debate on the bill in the other place, and as I am sure we all share, we would like to hear more of this in this chamber.

A national day would serve to recognize the phenomenal contributions of physicians. It could perhaps also act as a means of recognizing the growth of the medical profession itself, from a fairly low-skill occupation with little in the way of formal standards or regulations at the beginning of the 19th century to the medicine practised in this new millennium, whose cures astonish and give us hope even in our darkest hours.

However, these considerations aside, I would like to take the opportunity presented by this bill to describe the actions that the federal government already takes to support the work of Canada's 86,644 physicians, 250 of whom I might add are directly employed by the federal government in the Canadian Armed Forces.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. He has approximately eight minutes remaining when the House next resumes debate on the question.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PROCESS USED TO DETERMINE LIBERAL CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP —SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on March 22, 2019, by the hon. member for Perth—Wellington concerning an apparent violation of section 49.8 of the Parliament of Canada Act.

[*Translation*]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and a number of other members also contributed to the discussion on this alleged question of privilege.

[*English*]

In raising this matter, the member for Perth—Wellington explained the meaning of certain provisions added to the Parliament of Canada Act in 2015. As a result, caucuses are legally obligated to conduct certain votes at their first meeting after a federal election, one of which is to confirm whether section 49.2 of the act, which stipulates the process for expelling a member from caucus, will apply.

The member for Perth—Wellington concluded by asking that the House be allowed to deal with this matter, given the lack of judicial recourse offered to members in this regard and the generally accepted limited authority of Speakers to interpret the law.

[*Translation*]

In response, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader contended that, as the member for Whitby confirmed that her resignation was in fact voluntary, the requirement of timeliness for a question of privilege had been disregarded, and the Speaker cannot

Speaker's Ruling

adjudicate on the legality of matters, the issue was a matter of debate, rather than a question of privilege.

• (1205)

[*English*]

With respect to this specific case, there are a few points that need to be clarified. I will deal with them in reverse order.

One, asking the House to deal with the possible expulsion of a member from caucus is not a proper subject for a question of privilege. If the member believes that the House needs to put in place certain practices, perhaps by way of additional Standing Orders, this should be done through a substantive motion following proper notice.

[*Translation*]

Two, as was pointed out, I as Speaker, have no role in the interpretation of statute nor in the conduct of these 2015 provisions. All that is allowed under subsection 49.8(5) of the Parliament of Canada Act is that I shall be informed of the results of any vote taken by a caucus to formally expel a member within the terms of the act.

[*English*]

Three, from the knowledge that I have, the hon. member for Whitby was not expelled. Instead, she voluntarily withdrew from the caucus to sit as an independent.

Based on this understanding and these facts, there is no question of privilege.

ALLEGED BREACH OF CAUCUS CONFIDENTIALITY—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on March 22, 2019, by the hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook concerning the alleged breach of the confidentiality of an Ontario Liberal caucus meeting.

In his intervention, the member argued that information reported in the media about the discussions held during the Ontario Liberal caucus on March 20, 2019, violated the expectations of confidentiality and was a breach of parliamentary privilege. He underscored that it was the publication of the confidential information, rather than the leak itself, that was the catalyst for him asking the Speaker to intervene.

[*Translation*]

In response, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons argued that, not only do matters of caucus proceedings generally lie beyond the Speaker's purview but, also, precedents demonstrate that prima facie questions of privilege have involved the secret recording of members in caucus.

The Chair is being asked to determine if, in this instance, the evidence presented is sufficient to have the Speaker intervene in a matter that is normally outside the confines of parliamentary proceedings.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Parliamentary caucus meetings are, by definition, meant to be exclusively for members belonging to the same political party. They are closed meetings, conducted in the expectation of airtight confidentiality. As the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* explains at page 34:

Because they are held in camera, caucus meetings allow Members to express their views and opinions freely on any matter which concerns them. Policy positions are elaborated, along with, in the case of the government party, the government's legislative proposals. Caucus provides a forum in which Members can debate their policy differences among themselves without compromising party unity.

While caucus meetings are obviously different from proceedings of the House, they nonetheless have an effect on, and ultimately serve, the interests of the House. The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook had good reason then to cite Speaker Milliken's ruling of March 25, 2004, which states at page 1712 of Debates:

The concept of caucus confidentiality is central to the operations of the House and to the work of all hon. Members.

[Translation]

The question that the Chair must consider carefully is how far, if at all, parliamentary privilege extends to protect the deliberations of a caucus. The precedents cited by the member for Flamborough—Glanbrook are helpful. One precedent led to the 22nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House on April 26, 2004. The report is useful because it explains what could trigger a possible intervention by the Chair. Basically, it is related to House support for these caucus meetings. As the report noted:

To the extent that caucus confidentiality is breached by Members by disclosing what was said or went on to non-members of caucus, this is a matter to be dealt with by each party caucus. Any unauthorized recording of caucus meetings, however, is a matter for the House itself. Not only does this arguably impede Members in carrying out their parliamentary functions, but it also could constitute a contempt of the House of Commons.

● (1210)

[English]

In the present case, it is not clear that it was caused by a failure of House support. Nor did any caucus members bring this to the attention of the House. Nonetheless, this should not be construed as an endorsement for divulging caucus information, even in the most general of terms, without the caucus approval.

Absent any sufficient evidence to demonstrate that members' privileges were breached, I must conclude that there is no question of privilege.

I thank honourable members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

*[Translation]***CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT**

Hon. Bill Blair (for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved that Bill C-93, An Act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to begin our debate on Bill C-93, which will amend the Criminal Records Act so that individuals who have criminal records for the simple possession of cannabis can quickly clear their record and live their lives to the fullest.

[English]

This bill proposes the unprecedented and exceptional measure of eliminating the waiting period and the application fee for people seeking a pardon for cannabis possession. This means that instead of waiting five years and paying the Parole Board \$631, applicants would not have to wait a single minute and would not owe the Parole Board a single cent.

Bill C-93 is the next logical step in a process that began during the last election campaign, when we committed to ending the prohibition of cannabis in Canada. The result of decades of prohibition was that Canadians were among the heaviest and youngest users of cannabis in the world. Under the former system, the illegal cannabis trade put \$7 billion annually into the pockets of organized crime, and Canadian law enforcement agencies spent over \$2 billion every year trying to enforce an ineffective and counterproductive legal regime.

Last October, we finally put an end to the old way of doing things, and cannabis is now legal and strictly regulated, as promised. However, one of the lingering consequences of the previous system is that it saddled many Canadians with criminal records, making it harder for them to get jobs, rent apartments, travel or volunteer in their communities. The people affected are disproportionately from minority communities.

To be sure, they broke the law. They committed what, at the time, was a criminal offence, and there were consequences for that. However, people who were convicted only of possession of cannabis for personal use, an activity that is now legal, should be able to shed their criminal records and the associated burdens and stigma as quickly and as easily as possible. That is exactly what Bill C-93 would allow. This proposed legislation would create a pardon process for people convicted of simple cannabis possession that would be streamlined and simplified in multiple important ways.

Currently, to apply for a pardon or record suspension, which has been the legal term used since 2012, a person who has completed a sentence has to wait several years before submitting an application. It can be five or even 10 years, depending on the circumstances. Under Bill C-93, there would be no waiting period at all.

Government Orders

Currently, the Parole Board charges a \$631 application fee, which is obviously a major barrier. That is especially true for low-income Canadians who need to clear their records so that they can get jobs and earn salaries. However, without those jobs and salaries, they cannot afford the fee. Bill C-93 would eliminate the application fee.

Ordinarily, in addition to requiring police and court records, the law puts the onus on the applicants to demonstrate that they have been of good conduct and that receiving a pardon would provide them with measurable benefits. These subjective factors are considered by government-appointed Parole Board members who make a judgment call about whether to grant the pardon. Under Bill C-93, for people whose only offence was simple possession of cannabis, the good conduct and measurable benefits factors would be eliminated. Applications would be quickly processed by public servants at the Parole Board, because there would be no judgment call to make. If the police and court records showed that a person's only conviction was for possession of cannabis for personal use, that person would get a pardon.

In short, there would be no application fee, no waiting period and no need to convince the Parole Board to grant a pardon based on subjective criteria. This would dramatically simplify and accelerate the process.

However, these are just some of the measures in the bill. There are additional practical steps the Parole Board is taking to make it even quicker and easier for people to apply. For instance, it is redesigning the application form to make it simpler to understand and faster to complete. It is devoting resources to work with people to ensure that applications are properly submitted. It is updating and clarifying the information on its website and preparing a step-by-step application guide, a 1-800 number and a dedicated email address specifically to help people with cannabis possession convictions make use of this new expedited process. Plus, it is developing an outreach strategy that will involve community partners, civil society organizations and social media to make people aware of the new process and how to access it.

●(1215)

[*Translation*]

It should not be harder for people to work, go to school, travel, find housing or volunteer because they once committed an act that is no longer illegal.

All the legislative and operational amendments that I just mentioned will ensure that individuals who have a criminal record for nothing more than simple cannabis possession will be able to move forward in life as fully reintegrated members of society.

[*English*]

The process of developing our approach for dealing with criminal records for cannabis possession involved a great deal of discussion, both internally and with stakeholders, such as the Campaign for Cannabis Amnesty. We ultimately settled on the streamlined pardons process I have described, but we carefully examined other possibilities, such as amnesty and expungement, and I will address both approaches to explain why we did not choose them.

The amnesty approach is being used in California, where the state is proactively and automatically clearing people's records without

requiring applications. I completely understand the appeal of that approach, but in Canada at the moment, it is, unfortunately, a practical impossibility.

Canadian law has never had an offence known as “cannabis possession”. The record of a person convicted of possessing cannabis might say something like “possession of a controlled substance in Schedule II”, without referring to one of the several substances in that schedule.

Therefore, to find everyone who was ever convicted of cannabis possession, we would first have to find everyone who was ever convicted of possession of a controlled substance in the same category as cannabis, and then, in each case, go through the court documents to find out what the substance actually was. That would be challenging enough if all those records were held in one central repository, but that is not at all the case. We have a patchwork of different law enforcement authorities at various levels of government, each with its own records and record-keeping systems.

Some of these systems are sophisticated and computerized, but others are literally papers in locked boxes in a courthouse basement. In other words, proactively clearing people's records for cannabis possession would require a massive amount of resources at all levels of government, and it would take a very long time. People would still be waiting to have their records cleared years from now. It is much simpler to receive applications in which people provide the specifics of their particular cases. That would allow the Parole Board to process the files much faster and would allow applicants to have their records cleared much sooner, and that is the point.

●(1220)

There have also been calls for expungement instead of pardons. The difference is that a pardon sequesters a person's record so that it does not show up in a criminal records check, whereas expungement eliminates any mention of the offence from all records, as though it never happened in the first place.

Expungement actually did not exist in Canada until last year, when we used it for the very first, and thus far only, time to deal with historic convictions for consensual sexual activity between same sex partners. The idea was that the laws in those cases were unconstitutional. They should never have existed, and they were, by their very nature, fundamentally and inherently unjust.

The prohibition of cannabis was bad public policy, but it did not violate the charter. Still, there is no question that in its application, it had a disproportionate impact on certain groups of Canadians, especially members of black and indigenous communities. It is in recognition of that fact that we are proposing the exceptional and unprecedented measures contained in this bill.

Government Orders

Practically, for the applicant, the effect of a pardon or an expungement would be virtually the same. With either approach, a prospective landlord or employer would not be able to find out about a past conviction. In fact, the Canadian Human Rights Act expressly prohibits discrimination on the basis of a pardoned criminal record. The goal of letting a person move on with his or her life without the burden of a criminal record would be achieved in both cases.

The only realistic scenario in which a pardoned record for cannabis possession could be reinstated would be if a person committed a new offence, and at that point, because of the new offence he or she committed, the person would have a criminal record anyway. The impact of reinstating the cannabis conviction would be pretty minimal.

When it comes to international travel, in particular to the United States, an expungement could cause additional complications that a pardon would not. That is because the U.S. might have a previously existing record of a person's conviction, likely from when that person crossed the border or tried to cross it in the past. Even if a criminal record check came up empty today, which would happen with either a pardon or an expungement, the American border officer would have a note in the file from the last time. The officer could insist that a person get a waiver or provide more information about the conviction. If the record was pardoned, the person could contact the Parole Board and get the information needed to satisfy the U.S. border officer. However, if the record was expunged, there would be no documentation for the Parole Board to provide, and one might simply be denied entry.

• (1225)

[Translation]

The bottom line is that the approach we are proposing in Bill C-93 is a practical and efficient way of clearing the criminal records of those who were charged with simple possession of cannabis.

[English]

We would waive the fee, which is \$631, and we would waive the waiting period, which is usually five years. We would eliminate the subjective factors, such as whether the applicant has been of good conduct and whether the pardon would provide a measurable benefit. We would make the application process simpler and more user-friendly.

I am proud that during the last election campaign, whether others were talking about maintaining the status quo or proposing timid half-measures, such as decriminalization, our party had the courage to recognize that bold action was needed. We made a commitment to legalize and regulate cannabis, the better to keep cannabis out of the hands of Canadian youth and the profits out of the hands of criminals. We upheld that commitment, and now we have put forward a bill that would help people criminalized by the previous system turn the page so that they would no longer bear the stigma and the burden of a criminal record.

I invite all hon. members to join me in supporting this important legislation.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Vancouver East, for example, we have a significant number of people who are impacted by having a criminal record. As well,

racialized communities like the black community and the indigenous community have a much higher number of individuals who have been charged with possession of cannabis. In our community, if a person has to go through a process of getting a pardon, it sets up a barrier for them. Many people would not be able to engage in that process, accordingly. One of the reasons the NDP has called for an expungement of the criminal records is to simply facilitate this process.

We are now in a situation where cannabis possession is no longer illegal. Would it not make sense for the government to expunge the records of every single individual who was previously impacted? That would be a fair process to embark on. I would urge the government to reconsider this process, with particular consideration to its impact on the indigenous community and people from racialized communities.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her advocacy.

I think that what we are trying to do is to make this happen quickly. The Parole Board has made it quite clear that part of its plan is an outreach strategy to connect with community organizations, to connect with the people who do this kind of work and who support these kinds of changes. The member will find them in her community. They will be out there and will be active in order to help people take advantage of this.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness said that the purpose of Bill C-45 was to keep some \$7 billion out of the pockets of organized crime.

Does she know whether organized crime revenues have dropped or, instead, stayed the same?

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I have seen news reports that they are tracking that change. They have seen it. Of course, this is not going to happen overnight. We are only six months in, but they have already seen changes.

We still have more work to do in order to get the full effect of the bill that we are looking for. However, we are heading in the right direction.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

However, there seems to be a problem of substance and process in Bill C-93.

I will certainly have a chance to come back to the substance. As far as the process is concerned, although I am not the dean of the House, it seems to me that at the rate we are doing our work, I do not see how this bill will pass and receive royal assent before we rise for the summer.

Government Orders

I have a very simple question. Is this just a bill that does not go far enough or is it a smokescreen to appease the public?

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I think it was quite clear through the process of the legalization of cannabis that this would be one element of it. We could not introduce it before the original bill was put forward, as this is part of that process.

The way this bill was drafted, it is quite clear what we are trying to achieve. Having it come to the House for debate is an important first step. We believe there is time in the legislative calendar to make it happen.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was speaking to a number of people from the Canadian Police Association last week when they were here on the Hill. They have some concerns about the bill.

My colleague mentioned waiving the fee of \$631. However, on the other side of that, I think before we pass the bill we as parliamentarians need to know what the cost would be to the treasury if we totally eliminate all of the fees.

More importantly, regarding the concern of totally eliminating the waiting period, I agree the inordinate amount of time that people are currently waiting is too long. However, would my colleague not agree that simply shrinking that waiting period to at least give the board a few days to research the final outcome would be a wiser solution than simply eliminating it totally and making the waiting period less than a minute?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, the cost of a pardon at \$631 makes it prohibitive for people, especially people who have been disadvantaged their entire lives. This is what we are trying to change. We are trying to make it so that people have access to this, so they can get a job, rent an apartment and change the trajectory they are on.

The waiting time commenced at the time of the conviction. With this bill, people who were convicted four years ago could apply today. They do not have to wait that extra year. They can move forward with their lives and shed the stigma of having a criminal record. That is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize that, over the last couple of years, we have seen the department work with many different stakeholders to ensure that when it came time for the legislation, in essence, everyone would already have a good sense of the process.

To highlight the importance of the legislation's passing, it will have a very profound and positive impact on the lives to those individuals who require a pardon. The member across the way made reference to their being able to apply for a job, among many other things.

I wonder if the member can provide her thoughts on the manner in which the bill has been rolled out, by working with the different stakeholders. That is one of the reasons why we have seen very little resistance to it. It seems to me that we have really crossed the t's and dotted the i's to make sure we got it right.

● (1235)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely right. We understood the kind of impact this could have on the lives of people and really wanted to make sure we rolled it out well. We have talked to a lot of people and we have listened. However, we decided that this approach to a pardon, making it quick, accessible and at the community level, will have the most significant impact, not only in the short term but also the long term. The impact on the individual is the same whether it is a pardon or an expungement. We just want to make it happen sooner.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, in response to my question, the parliamentary secretary said that the parole officers could be in touch with the individuals to move the issue forward. However, in cases where the charge was some time ago and the person may not be connected to the criminal justice system anymore, how would that connection be made?

The truth of the matter is that this process will create a bureaucracy. It will create costs that, in my view, would be unnecessary. If the government went forward with an expungement process, it would apply to everybody who has the record, regardless of whether or not they are going forward with a pardon procedure and process. Would that not be a far more effective and efficient way of doing it to ensure that nobody is left behind? If that is the goal of the government, to make sure nobody is left behind, then it should go forward with an expungement process.

On the issue regarding the border crossing and the concerns there, the government has brought forward an expungement process in other situations, particularly for those who were faced with criminal charges in the LGBTQ community. Therefore, if we can deal with it in that instance, surely we can apply the same principle in this instance with respect to cannabis possession.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, we wanted to achieve something that would make this happen quickly and give people a chance to build new lives. The impact on individuals, whether an expungement or a pardon, is virtually identical and a pardon allows us to move this along a lot quicker.

We are going to be reaching out to civil society organizations, community outreach people and community partners to make sure that this information gets out there. That connection with the people who are looking after people at the community level is going to be key.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to talk about Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis.

The first thing I want to tell the government is that we think this is pretty reasonable, but there are "buts". We think most Canadians are okay with erasing records for simple possession of cannabis. We agree on that, especially when it comes to young people. A lot of young people get caught when they are just trying marijuana. They might be in a park, the police happen to be there, and they end up with a record for something that is really just a youthful indiscretion.

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Of course, there are also adults who have tried marijuana or used it while it was illegal. After he was elected, our own Prime Minister admitted to smoking cannabis while it was still illegal. As we see it, that is not very good, considering what one represents once one is elected and becomes a federal MP and then the Prime Minister. Still, he admitted to smoking while it was illegal. That is not a good example to set for Canadians.

However, we understand that for younger people, minors or youth, this can fall under the category of youthful mistakes. What we are accepting with Bill C-93 is the clearing of the criminal records of people who were convicted of simple possession once in their lives. We are not talking about people who were caught many times, like 200 or 300 times, or people who have a criminal history or other offences on their criminal records. In the case of a one-time conviction for simple possession, we can accept that it was a mistake and grant a pardon.

Although we are prepared to support the idea of Bill C-93 at second reading, we would need to study the bill in detail in committee, because much of it is unclear. There is no preamble and no clear explanation of the goals of the bill or who could benefit from it and why. That is why the committee study will be important. It will be vital to dig into the details and get down to the nitty-gritty to figure out what is not being said. It is often the unspoken elements that require clarification.

Let us talk about the costs involved, for example. It is estimated that about 500,000 Canadians have criminal records for simple possession. The cost of applying for a pardon is a little over \$600. If you multiply those numbers, it comes to \$315 million, so that is how much would normally be paid by those taxpayers who have a criminal record. The government wants to make it free. This means that Government of Canada resources will be used to process the files of these individuals, who would normally have to pay for it themselves. If they were paying, that would cover the cost of processing these records, which amounts to roughly \$315 million. That is not insignificant. We in the Conservative Party are wondering why other taxpayers should have to pay indirectly for these individuals to apply for a pardon.

It is typical of the Liberal government to believe that money is no object. The Liberals never consider taxpayers, who pay a lot of money in taxes. They never say “no”, and they throw money around left, right and centre. We have been watching them do this for the past three and a half years. This comes as no surprise. To us Conservatives, however, these are important considerations.

I want to come back to Bill C-45, which is one of the things that led to Bill C-93 currently before the House. Bill C-45 is the notorious marijuana legalization bill, which was introduced in a hurry to fulfill an election promise. However, it raised a great many questions that have never been answered. The government says it consulted experts and received information. We know that is completely false—or perhaps it did not really listen to the feedback given in those consultations. Police forces had all kinds of concerns, as did the medical community. Issues were raised but were never taken into consideration. Landlords also had questions about cultivation and use inside apartment buildings. Those issues were never resolved, and this creates uncertainty.

● (1240)

Given the way Bill C-45 was passed and expedited in order to fulfill the famous election promise and pander to young voters who voted Liberal because of it, we think that there will always be questions, especially since the government did not want to listen to law enforcement and doctors, among others. Even if I started out by saying that we are prepared to support Bill C-93, we must still thoroughly examine this bill, because we do not want the Liberals to pull a fast one, as the expression goes.

First of all, the legalization of marijuana was supposed to reduce the proceeds of organized crime. The parliamentary secretary spoke about it in his speech. Sales of marijuana alone by organized crime are estimated at \$7 billion. The Liberals said they were legalizing marijuana to take this money out of the pockets of organized crime and put it in the government's coffers. However, this was a false argument and a public relations exercise. We know that organized crime continues to sell marijuana. It even copied the labelling of products sold in legal stores in developing its packaging. This law did not stop organized crime from continuing to do business.

Furthermore, since it is now legal, no one is afraid of getting arrested, which is kind of odd. People are still using illegal drugs and organized crime continues to profit. The concerns we raised while we were debating Bill C-45 have now proven to be valid.

Again, we do support the spirit of the bill, but we want to study the bill in committee to be sure that the final version is very clear. This is my first term as a member of Parliament, but I have been learning quickly. I learned rather quickly that the Prime Minister is not to be trusted. Recent events are proof of that. The Prime Minister raised a lot of hopes, but the promises turned out to be snake oil. He made promises to everyone, but at the end of the day, we now know they meant nothing. He claimed to be a feminist. He said that the status of women was important and that he would make it a focus of debate as much as possible. Everyone knows what he did with the three female MPs who now sit as independents.

The Prime Minister also mocked Stephen Harper, saying he did not take the needs of indigenous people into consideration. He said that he cared about indigenous people and he was going to fix the situation. Last week, however, we saw young indigenous women turn their backs on our Prime Minister here in the House. Indigenous communities in Canada heard all the lofty promises that were made, but the Prime Minister kept breaking those promises.

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Getting back to the legalization of marijuana, I would remind the House that the Prime Minister was in such a hurry to fulfill his election promise that he did not listen to the municipalities, law enforcement, employers and scientists. The Conservatives are often accused of not believing in science, but the first to ignore scientists were this Liberal Prime Minister and his team. They keep shaking their heads, but they ignored scientists from across Canada regarding the problems associated with marijuana.

The government also promised to create a legal framework for derivative products and set standards for the sale of edibles and concentrates such as hashish within 12 months of legalizing marijuana. That was six months ago, and we still have not seen a plan to make that happen. This is yet another unfulfilled promise, and seeing as this session is about to end, it will probably be another broken promise.

It is easy to see why the majority of Canadians feel betrayed by this Liberal government. Much like Obama, the Prime Minister made a lot of noise but over-promised and under-delivered. All too often, we have heard the Liberals downplay the dangers of marijuana, and now that they have legalized it, future generations will think cannabis consumption is no big deal. Even my own children are now saying that it is legal and smoking it just to try it out is fine. That is not how it works though. It may be legal, but it is still very dangerous. Young people need to understand that it is hazardous to their health, not a harmless consumer product.

●(1245)

Experts say it is especially dangerous for young people, and everyone agrees.

In a *Globe and Mail* article published in April 2017, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society and other organizations representing front-line health care providers express their concerns about the ill effects of cannabis, especially for chronic smokers under the age of 25.

In this article, the experts say to please keep the public health focus front of mind as this legislation is unrolled. That is a direct quote from Dr. Gail Beck, the clinical director of youth psychiatry at the Royal Ottawa Hospital. She also says that lots of people think this is harmless.

I would like to read out this article to show the House that cannabis consumption really does have consequences. These are the words of experts, not politicians. The experts quoted in this article say that the medical profession in this country has long had misgivings about medicinal marijuana, namely that there is not enough solid evidence of pot's efficacy in treating chronic pain and other ailments to warrant a doctor's endorsement. However, with the advent of legal recreational marijuana, doctors have a different set of worries.

A major concern is the potential for marijuana addiction, in particular among teens and young adults. Christina Grant, a professor of pediatrics at McMaster University in Hamilton, says that one in seven adolescents who start using cannabis will develop a cannabis use disorder, which is significant.

Dr. Grant, a principal author at the Canadian Pediatric Society, released a statement last fall, saying that cannabis use crosses over into disorder territory when it begins to cause dysfunction in users' day-to-day lives, derailing their commitment to school or work and sowing conflict in their families.

Cannabis has also been associated with certain mental illnesses. We still do not know how the medication, depression and anxiety all connect. Science has not yet established a cause and effect relationship between the two. In other words, we cannot be certain whether people smoke cannabis because they are depressed and anxious or if they are depressed and anxious because they smoke cannabis.

Dr. Beck says there is stronger evidence that heavy use of cannabis can lead to psychosis, especially among people who have a family history of mental illness. However, the vast majority of the research involved people who use cannabis daily. The scientific literature is virtually silent on the mental health effects of occasional use.

Dr. Grant noted that we do not know the lower limit that is safe and there is no evidence to suggest that nothing will happen if a person uses cannabis once or twice.

There is good evidence that teens who smoke pot frequently suffer long-lasting damage to their still immature brains, including problems with memory, attention and executive functioning. Dr. Grant added that, for teenagers who use cannabis regularly, there are actually structural changes that are visible on MRI. She adds that certain areas of the brain are visibly smaller, there is thinning of a part of the brain called the cortex, which is very important in terms of thinking and planning and organizing.

The adult brain appears capable of recovering from chronic pot use in a few weeks. According to Dr. Beck, that is not what happens in young people. Citing concerns about the adolescent brain, the Canadian Medical Association, which represents the country's physicians, last year urged the federal government to ban the sale of marijuana to people under the age of 21 and to restrict the amount and potency of the drug available to those younger than 25.

Most of the health concerns associated with cannabis apply to heavy users. However, occasional tokers can wreak havoc if they get behind the wheel while high. For an occasional user to consume some pot and then get behind the wheel is a recipe for disaster.

According to Amy Porath, director of research and policy for the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, cannabis impairs our ability to safely drive a vehicle. It impairs our reaction time, our ability to multitask and to pay attention. Police across the country are currently piloting a roadside saliva test to see if it adequately detects cannabis-impaired drivers.

Whether it is tobacco or cannabis, Dr. Porath said, there are concerns with smoking anything. Smoking can cause coughing, wheezing, sore throat and tightness in the chest. It can also aggravate asthma.

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That article was published before marijuana was legalized. Major concerns were raised in this 2017 Globe and Mail article, which looks at the problems with marijuana.

• (1250)

I am bringing it up again and members may be wondering why I am talking about this. It all comes back to the basic concept, which is the way marijuana was legalized. The government completely ignored experts, scientists and police officers. It completely ignored the proposals that the opposition made in committee. It also completely ignored the work of the Senate. Senators proposed a lot of amendments but the Liberals rejected all of them, just like they rejected the proposals of the official opposition.

That is why we are prepared to say that Bill C-93 might make sense. Given the way the government works, we would never go so far as to say that the bill is extraordinary and that we will vote in favour of it without any debate. That would be impossible because there are always grey areas, things that are unclear.

The Liberals know what they want. They have a course of action and a way of doing things. As for us, our duty is to examine the issues, ask the right questions and propose any necessary amendments.

We are therefore prepared to support Bill C-93 at second reading. However, it needs to be reworked in committee, and I hope that the government will listen to and understand the amendments that will be proposed. I am sure that the NDP will also propose amendments.

Unfortunately, we do not have enough information to immediately pass the bill in its current form. We need to go a little further, to dig a little deeper. After the committee does its work and the Liberal government makes some decisions, we will decide how to move forward. At this point, we have some doubts. We will see what happens, and then we will respond accordingly.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians have been waiting anxiously to see this legislation come forward. It would put in place an opportunity for people to eventually get a pardon. This would enable them to maybe get that job, or a driver's licence or other opportunities as a direct result this. It would also be affordable.

We have seen the legislation regarding the legalization of cannabis, which has been done in a fairly holistic way. Others in the chamber have argued that we should have done more, gone further. However, the Conservatives seem to be saying that we might have gone too far.

I may have missed it, but I am curious to know the Conservatives' position on this legislation. Do they see themselves supporting it or voting against it?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned at the beginning of my speech that we are prepared to support the bill at second reading. However, there are many factors to consider, and we are not entirely confident because certain details are missing from the bill.

We will have to delve deeper in committee. We will propose amendments and hope the Liberal government accepts them.

At second reading, we will vote to send this bill to committee for further discussion. We accept the principle of the bill, but we have many questions regarding the details.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The part where he referred to youthful indiscretion really caught my attention. There was a time not so long ago when it was illegal to use or possess marijuana. When someone was caught for possession of marijuana, most people thought it was a minor crime that did not require major investment and could be overlooked.

Today, it is entirely legal. It is no longer a matter of youthful indiscretion, since it is now possible to use or possess marijuana.

Since we are no longer talking about youthful indiscretion, does my colleague agree that we should not just suspend records, but expunge them?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

We have to stop saying that what happened in the past no longer matters because it is legal now. At the time, it was illegal.

Forget about marijuana use for a minute and think about any other crime. If the crime in question becomes legal in 20 years will it no longer matter because it was committed today? No, it was a crime at the time that it was committed. The action has to be considered criminal. Just because it is legal today does not mean that the crime no longer matters.

As far as expunging records versus suspending them is concerned, I think record suspension is enough.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I paid close attention to my hon. colleague. Earlier, he talked about legalizing cannabis. We consulted people in my riding, and this was a major policy shift in Canada.

My colleague talked about problems associated with cannabis consumption and mental health as well. In his view, how will legalization and the government's direction on this enable researchers to do more research aimed at avoiding any links there might be to mental health?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I am trying to understand her question, but, as far as I know, legalization has not helped mental health. According to reports and comments we have been getting from medical professionals, some mental health problems are related to cannabis consumption.

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As I said in my speech, people can now buy cannabis legally, but the black market is still flourishing and continues to supply cannabis to young people. Cannabis does not even make people bat an eyelid now. During our earliest speeches on Bill C-45, we said that legalization would make people think of cannabis consumption as no big deal, and that is exactly what is happening.

The goal was to implement measures to ensure that young people would not use it or would use it only once they reached legal age. That is not what we are seeing. With respect to mental health, I would encourage my colleague to check with the Minister of Health, who I am sure has more up-to-date information than I. What I have been hearing is that the situation has not improved.

• (1300)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciated hearing my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles speak to this bill, which is the logical follow-up to the legislation enacted on October 17, 2018.

I especially appreciated hearing about how the passage of the previous act completely disregarded science. As the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles pointed out, a number of scientists, studies and doctors highlighted the real public health dangers when someone sadly uses this product.

I have a question for my colleague that touches on what my NDP colleagues were saying earlier. Naturally, once it is legal, it is legal. This does not necessarily mean that it is trivial, but it is legal, as Dr. Carmant, the minister responsible for health and social services for the Government of Quebec, so aptly pointed out. However, it was not legal in the past. The member said earlier that, in his opinion, a pardon would be the best option for those who committed what was previously an illegal act.

I would like to hear more about this.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for the question.

The difference between pardons and expungement, which is what the NDP is calling for, is that with a pardon, the offence is kept separate on an individual's record. That means the offence will not show up on a background check if the person applies for a job. However, if the person goes on to commit another crime, the judge may consider the fact that they had previously been charged with cannabis possession.

The important thing now is to make sure that people who have a record just for simple possession are able to work, to get a job, to be free, by keeping the offence separate. However, if they decide to commit other crimes, the offence will go back on their record.

Expungement means the offence is erased completely, as if it never happened. That is what we are opposed to. Crime is crime. We need to remember that the law is the law and must be obeyed.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the conversation has been not only about record suspension for cannabis possession but potentially other criminal offences. I am hearing from many of my constituents who feel that taxpayers should not be on the hook for paying for the suspensions.

They do not necessarily disagree that suspensions should be available for minor possession, but they are concerned that taxpayers should have to cover the cost to the system.

I am wondering what my colleague is hearing with respect to the cost and whether there is common ground we could arrive at that is fair to both the people seeking the suspensions and the taxpayers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

That is indeed the kind of thing we are hearing. People are asking us why they, as taxpayers, should indirectly pay for people who committed a crime in the past. Can the cost be re-evaluated? That is something we could discuss in committee. The previous government did an evaluation of the cost of applying for a pardon. It costs \$631. That is the exact cost that was calculated back then. It includes the time it takes for public officials and all the bureaucracy to process a pardon application.

We realize that the fees could be too high for low-income people. We are ready to have a discussion about the possibility of changing the costs. However, to go back to what I was saying in my speech, we cannot waive all the fees for everyone, because other taxpayers would have to pay for it through their taxes, and we think that is unfair.

• (1305)

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain at the outset that the NDP will oppose this legislation. Over the next 20 minutes that I have available, I hope to explain why record suspension is not the way to go, and record expungement, which I will describe, is the way to go. Record expungement for simple possession is the basis of my private member's bill, Bill C-415, which will be up for second reading debate in the chamber on Thursday.

I have risen on previous occasions in this place to call Bill C-93 a half-baked measure, and I am still of that opinion. Let me explain: It is too little and it is too late.

It is too little, because record suspension is just that, putting a criminal record aside where it could potentially be used again against the individual. It ignores the historical injustice, the disproportionate impact of cannabis possession offences on marginalized Canadians, on blacks and particularly on indigenous people.

It is too late, because it is almost six months since October when we had the historic legalization of possession of cannabis. Here we are, almost at the end of this parliamentary session, starting second reading debate on the bill. It has to go before committee. It has to go to the Senate. It has to go before Senate committees. I am anxious that this will not be law in Canada, as it will die on the Order Paper until the next Parliament addresses that.

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It is especially disappointing because the Liberals have had years to do this. Their excuse was to wait until possession was legal on October 17, 2018. Now we are almost six months later, in the dying days of this Parliament, and suddenly talking about it.

I hope that cynicism is not warranted. I hope there is goodwill on the part of the government to fix the bill and move it forward expeditiously. However, I have my doubts.

My private member's bill, which is the counter to this piece of legislation, would require an application process for expungement. In an ideal world, my bill would have had automatic expungement, which is the case in Delaware and California, where officials sweep the records, find out whether a person has a record, for simple possession in effect, and if so, the record is deemed never to have existed. It is gone. It is zapped from the system.

This legislation would require an application. My bill does too, but that is because, as the House well knows, it is a private member's bill, and due to a technicality called the royal recommendation, I could not ask the government to expend money. I was not able to do what has been done south of the border with automatic expungement. That would apply universally and automatically and benefit, disproportionately, indigenous and racialized Canadians.

Let us just stand back from this. We have an activity which is perfectly legal now, but for which hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps that high, have a record for past consumption of cannabis, possession of cannabis, when it was illegal, and now they cannot get on with their lives.

Why does that matter? It matters because blacks cannot rent apartments because they have a criminal record and are on the bottom of the list in a tight housing market. As I will explain later, there are way more people in Halifax who were charged with a cannabis offence and have a record for cannabis than the non-black population.

Believe it or not, it is most glaring in Regina, Saskatchewan. This is government data; this is not me. This is from records disclosed under access to information. An indigenous person in Regina is nine times more likely to have a record for cannabis possession than a non-indigenous person. A black individual is five times more likely in Halifax and three times more likely in Toronto to have the same. An indigenous person in Vancouver is seven times more likely to have a cannabis record. This matters. We would call this law, adverse effects discrimination. We would call this constructive discrimination.

● (1310)

That is why it is so galling that the government wants to bring in a half-baked measure in Bill C-93, rather than doing what is done in California. In San Francisco, there is an automatic intelligence system that simply sweeps the records to make them disappear for those who have a possession of cannabis offence on their record.

Let us contrast this with what the government wants to do today. To its credit, it wants to bring in a bill that says people no longer have to pay \$631 for having a criminal record suspended, which is what Mr. Harper introduced, and they no longer have to wait for five years. I congratulate the government for that minor step in the right direction.

In the U.S., a person's record is automatically expunged in the states I have mentioned. These records are deemed not to exist. This matters because it allows people who are asked by a landlord whether they have a criminal record for anything to tell that landlord they do not. When asked by an employer if they have a criminal record, people who have only a cannabis possession charge from several years ago in their background can say they do not, because under expungement, it is deemed not to exist.

The government tells us not to worry and that we do not understand, because there is a human rights statute federally and in all the provinces that says people cannot face discrimination on the grounds that they have a criminal record for which a pardon has been granted. Tell that to an inner city landlord in downtown Halifax or to an inner city employer or small business operator in downtown Vancouver.

It is ludicrous. Why would the government not do the right thing, getting this all done at the same time and done properly, rather than bringing in this half-baked measure? It is too little, too late, which I am sad to say is my theme.

I am not the only one with this opinion. I am pleased to say that the Liberal member of Parliament for Beaches—East York acknowledges the limitations of the bill. He said:

Only full amnesty recognizes the disproportionate impact of cannabis prohibition on people of colour and the fact that cannabis should never have been criminalized in the first place.

Our government's solution is better than nothing, but it's not enough to be better than nothing when we have an opportunity to make historic injustices right.

I am quoting a Liberal member, not someone who has an axe to grind, if you will, on this issue. This is a Liberal who realizes we can do so much better.

One of the arguments the Liberals have used to explain why we cannot have expungement is that many people would be affected and it would cost so much money and take so much time. However, that is not true anymore, because we have new data suggesting that only some 10,000 people would be positively affected by the bill. That is not a very large number. Why can we not expunge their records rather than simply giving them this record suspension, after which records move from one filing cabinet to another and can come back and bite people later in a subsequent event if the state deems that they have committed another crime?

What about crimes such as failure to appear? These are called administration of justice offences. They are not like the actual offence of cannabis possession. They occur when people do not pay a fine or do not show up in court. In these situations the criminal justice system is continually on a person's back, even though the root of it all was a cannabis possession charge.

I have been advised that indigenous women are sometimes affected down the road in this way when they have custody issues with their children. This occurs not because of the cannabis offence but because of the other matters on their record that have resulted from that. It is ludicrous.

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The government says our most important relationship is with indigenous people. Here it could make a tiny but critically important change in the lives of so many. Why would it let this opportunity pass to expunge the records of people so they could say they have no criminal record, allowing them to get their foot on the social ladder in order to get employment, housing and the like? I do not understand the government's reluctance in this context.

Professor Kent Roach is one of Canada's leading criminal law specialists. Recently, in the *Criminal Law Quarterly*, he wrote, "The government's approach to cannabis convictions in the wake of legalization is even more problematic than the expungement act," which is another bill I will come to.

He continued, "It has announced plans to allow the National Parole Board to grant pardons under the Criminal Records Act. This again requires case-by-case applications. This places challenges on the most disadvantaged people who have been convicted of cannabis possession."

• (1315)

He goes on, "By not relying on expungement, the government's approach leaves applicants vulnerable to records of convictions and arrest being retained by the RCMP and other federal departments and to questions from prospective employers and landlords about whether they ever had a criminal conviction. It falls behind states such as California and Delaware in terms of reform."

He then goes on and says about my bill that it "...takes a better approach by proposing to expunge cannabis convictions including the destruction of records of convictions."

I am not here to score political points. I am not even running again in the next election. I am fully convinced that automatic expungement is the way to go. It is what people deserve. I implore the government to amend this bill and do the right thing by so many people who are affected, whose lives are on hold until we get this right.

Record suspension simply removes criminal records from the main database, CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, and puts the data somewhere else, where it can be used prejudicially later and potentially shared with other departments, thereby having a negative effect.

Expungement means those records disappear for all purposes and for all time. A record suspension or pardon indicates the government is forgiving or excusing individuals for criminal behaviour, and that is all; expungement acknowledges it was wrong to criminalize it in the first place.

At this time, let me give the House the other government excuse for not doing the right thing.

It brought in, to its credit, Bill C-66, which was called the Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act. That bill dealt with same-sex sexual activity, which is no longer criminalized but was in the past. The government said it was going to deem those offences to no longer be on a person's record—gone.

I have two things to say about that.

Number one is that since October, from the last statistics, do members know how many people have even bothered to apply, of the 9,000 eligible? It was seven. That hardly gives confidence that this application process is going to make a difference.

Number two is that the government says, "Oh, member for Victoria, do you know what we will do? We will say that this is to be reserved for things that are constitutionally over the line, such as same-sex sexual activity."

There is no principled reason for that smokescreen. I have talked to criminal law specialists and constitutional specialists across the country who say that this argument is not valid. Second, even if it were valid, which it is not, what about the constructive discrimination I just talked about, the adverse effects discrimination, whereby the policy and application affect blacks and indigenous people dramatically more than others? What about that?

Not doing the right thing for cannabis expungement as for same-sex sexual activity, which the government is prepared to expunge, makes no sense at all. It is another Liberal smokescreen.

I am not here to score political points; I am just trying to persuade the Liberals to do the right thing. Why would they not do it? That is what is so complicated for me to understand.

The NDP has been calling for this measure for years. I will not go through the whole background of it, but there are deficiencies in addition in the bill that is before us today. The Parole Board does not have the resources to do the job, so there are going to be even further backlogs for other applications from people seeking pardons. There is a whole industry, sadly, out there to help people get rid of their criminal records. If members go on the Internet, they will see everybody who wants to help if they give them a few hundred bucks.

The forms are complicated. Members might not think they are, but for a poor person with little education who is living in the inner city, this measure would impose another burden, and I do not understand why, when our friends south of the border figured it out much more readily.

There are also eligibility gaps in Bill C-93. Only those people convicted of simple possession are eligible, meaning anyone with prior record suspensions of crimes related to the simple possession charges will not be able to use this process. I gave the example of failure to appear or not paying the fine or the like. If there is another offence on the record, then they are facing an inability to apply.

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• (1320)

Someone pointed out that if a person has a summary conviction offence and then four years down has another cannabis offence, there may be a total wait of nine years to apply under this bill. I do not believe that was intended, but it is a function of the drafting of the bill, according to experts I have consulted. That is problematic.

The Liberals have had six months since they brought in legalization to do this. This bill is maybe four and a half or five pages in English, so how on earth did it take that long? The elephant laboured and brought forth a mouse.

Bill C-75, which was 302 pages, was before the justice committee, and it rammed that one through. This bill is five pages in English and maybe nine pages in total with English and French. It took the Liberals that long to produce this tiny bill, this weak bill. Presumably they can just check it off on the list that another promise was kept, except if the bill dies on the Order Paper, as most people are anticipating.

This is a real problem. This is an opportunity for the government. My hope is that if the private member's bill that I have before Parliament for debate on Thursday goes to the public safety committee at the same time as this bill, perhaps there will be a way in which some of the provisions that I have suggested for expungement could be brought into the bill that is before us and we could get it right for the victims as they are.

It is not just me saying this. The Prime Minister has been quoted as follows: "...there is a disproportionate representation of young people, from minorities and racialized communities, who are saddled with criminal convictions for simple possession as a significant further challenge to success in the job market...." He seems to get it.

The statistics that the government has produced under access to information confirm what I am saying. I am not making up those shocking statistics about overrepresentation of blacks and, particularly, indigenous people. The Prime Minister gets the consequences, so why would the Liberals not do it right? I do not understand.

Professor Doob, the famous criminology professor at the University of Toronto, stated:

There is no justification for forcing those who were convicted to live with a criminal record for behaviour that will soon not be criminal. A procedure for dealing with the problem has been devised by the current government. They should ensure that relevant drug records are expunged for the thousands of Canadians who have them.

Senator Pate, who has been very powerful on this issue in the other place, has made similar arguments, and I hope that those points are taken into account by the Liberals opposite.

I have been working with a very talented lawyer in Toronto, Annamaria Enenajor, who is the director of Campaign for Cannabis Amnesty. She is a prominent lawyer in Toronto and clerked for the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. She is volunteering for this important cause and she states:

...the government...leaves the impression that restrictions exist on the government's ability to issue expungements for the offense of simple cannabis possession that are beyond its control. This is false. There is nothing in Canadian law that prohibits our government from issuing expungements for offenses that, in their application, unjustly targeted racialized and indigenous communities. It simply chooses not to. This is a policy decision.

That is the nub of the argument. Let us do it right.

There may be some good arguments in theory. I talked about the theoretical ability to apply the human rights legislation when people have been given pardons and so on, but it does not work in the real world. We have an absolute dearth of money for legal aid, and legal aid rarely covers human rights complaints if one has been discriminated against because of one's record. Theoretically, I guess, the Liberals could hang their hat on that, but they sure have not visited many inner cities if they think that is a viable argument in practice. Many small businesses and landlords draft their own applications and may not be aware of human rights legislation.

• (1325)

We have a historic opportunity in the dying days of this Parliament to do it right. Let us expunge criminal records for small quantity cannabis possession and help those thousands of Canadians who need a head start and a chance to get their foot on the rung in the social ladder. Let us do the right thing for those people as soon as we can.

Mr. John Oliver (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the laws for cannabis have changed in Canada, it is only right that people with simple possession charges have them removed, which the bill would do. It would allow a pardon and waive both the fees and the waiting period.

There is one area on which I want to challenge the hon. member. The NDP and the member for Victoria seem to want the process to be automatic rather than requiring applications. The member may not be aware that records across Canada are kept in different ways in many jurisdictions. Often in boxes in courthouse basements. Therefore, a proactive automatic process could take years for all those simple possession charges to be found and reversed. An application-based process would get people their pardons much faster.

Why does the NDP favour an approach that will make people wait possibly for years for their records to be cleared when this bill would offer a much faster route for them?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, first, it may be that certain changes will be needed to make automatic expungement efforts happen. In the United States, it was not an obstacle in states like Delaware, where the same issues arose.

Second, if as few as 10,000 people would be affected by Bill C-93, which is according to the number we have just heard, then I do not understand why the government could not find summer students to go through those files and determine who could be relieved of that burden. I do not understand why it is such an obstacle to get a few summer students to do the work.

It is easy to overstate the administrative burden of automatic expungement, but it is also not easy to stand by and watch so many people's lives being wrecked by the government's failure to act.

Government Orders

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to pay my respects to my hon. colleague from Victoria. He has served with dignity as well as a good, positive and strong attitude to defend his will, ideas and principles. I will always remember when we met almost four years ago. We worked together on very important legislation. At the committee that dealt with assisted suicide, the issue was addressed from members on both sides of the debate, with a lot of thought going into what was best for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I listened carefully to my colleague's remarks, and I want to say two things. First, we obviously have different views on the legalization of marijuana, but we did agree on one thing. The Conservatives and NDP agreed that marijuana should be decriminalized. For the first time, on this file, I also agreed with the Prime Minister when he said that cannabis would continue to be illegal until the bill was passed. An illegal act is and will always remain illegal. Now here we are with this bill, which seeks to determine what to do about people who committed illegal acts when those acts were still illegal.

I would like to hear what the member has to say about the proposal my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles made a few moments ago. He believes that the best approach to take here is to grant pardons. That way the offence would not show up in the person's criminal record, but it would become public if the person happens to reoffend.

What does he think about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to acknowledge the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for his contributions to this place. Saying that I remember fondly would be the wrong word to use, because it was a very trying and emotional experience being on the committee that dealt with physician-assisted dying. One of the highlights of my career, and I suspect of his as well, was the spirit of collaboration and co-operation that marked that important debate.

We agree on decriminalization, which was a common policy between our two parties. The government chose legalization. Now it is choosing record suspension over expungement. Why would I say there are problems with that?

I want to make a few quick points on the subject.

First, record suspensions can be revoked by subsequent parliaments. If people's records have been expunged, they are gone. Second, if people are no longer of good conduct or have what are called administration of justice offences that go along with their cannabis possession, then they can be removed by the National Parole Board. This cannot happen if they are being expunged. Third, some police and government agencies would still be able to access those records. In other words, there could be leaks that happen from time to time. As we know, some people who claimed to have no record in fact did have prior ones. Why would we take that chance with the lives of people?

• (1330)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I support the private member's bill by my friend, the member for Victoria. Certainly, it makes more sense to me to expunge a record.

However, I want to put this for the member. Now that we have government legislation in front of us that, while inadequate, goes part of the way toward what we want to see achieved, which is to remove the absurdity of criminal charges against people for an act that is no longer considered illegal, I wonder if he does not think we should work to get this bill through or, potentially, have it amended to achieve the scope of what a private member's bill cannot do and fix it at committee.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I really would like to have this go to committee. I hope there would be a will on the part of the government to do the right thing and amend it.

Normally, I would agree with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. However, the problem I have found is that after months of effort, the government seems to have a closed mind to expungement. Therefore, I do not see that there will be any uptake on this. As a consequence, I am loath to simply say that. Maybe there is a procedural way with the private member's bill, if it gets to committee, and this Bill C-93 at committee, to be somehow amalgamated. Perhaps there could be a positive change out of that.

However, I cannot support a bill that does not do the job and will continue to affect the lives of so many people.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Victoria, for his exemplary work on this file.

As we know, people from indigenous and racialized communities tend to have a higher criminal record because of the have been charged in the past with marijuana possession. Earlier I asked the parliamentary secretary why we would not have expungement in recognition of this issue. The fact that people would be required to go through a process to be pardoned already would set a barrier for them. The parliamentary secretary's response was to say that parole officers and people in the community would work with them.

Therefore, I would like to ask the member this. On the issue around fairness, with respect to ensuring everyone who has a criminal record for cannabis would no longer be faced with that record, is expungement not the best option? Does the suggestion that somehow parole officers can reach out to people to help them with this process make sense? I would also love to hear from the member about the impact on the racialized and indigenous communities as well.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, people in the riding of the member for Vancouver East are seven times more likely to have a record for cannabis possession if they are indigenous. That is particularly acute in Vancouver East. The notion that parole officers will help people fill out forms when they are overburdened already is ludicrous. A new government could come in and take away those officers. It could have gigantic cuts and that would be gone as well.

Government Orders

The barrier for applications cannot be overstated. It is real. If one understands marginalized communities in Canada, one will know that it is real. Why will the government not recognize that and do the right thing?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague shot down many of the arguments presented by the Liberals, who do not want to completely expunge the criminal records of individuals who have been convicted of simple cannabis possession. One of those arguments was economic in nature. The Liberals are saying it would cost too much. However, I think that we can further refute their argument by reminding them that individuals who were convicted of simple marijuana possession and who will still have a criminal record, because it will not go away completely and could be reinstated, will find it harder to get a job and will therefore be less able to contribute to the economy than someone who has no criminal record.

Does my colleague agree that that further refutes the Liberals' economic argument?

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, the member for Hochelaga made an excellent point, which, frankly, I had not thought of before. The cost benefit of this is staggeringly in favour of expungement. If people cannot get jobs, they are likely to be collecting some sort of social assistance, employment insurance, or the like. Whereas, if they can get jobs, because one no longer has a criminal record and can say that truthfully to the employer, then obviously the benefit to the economy and to individuals, their self-worth and so forth, is self-evident. I could not agree more with the member's helpful suggestion.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to rise today to speak to the Liberals' latest pot plan, Bill C-93, an act to give pardons to people who were charged with possession of an illegal substance in years past.

I would like to salute the NDP members for their ability to bring pressure to bear on the Liberals and force them to address this issue. The government did not respond until after the NDP brought this forward in the House, calling for action. They need to be recognized for forcing the government into acting.

The Liberal government of course has said that it has always had a plan. However, it sure seems to have been rushed for something that was a long time in the planning.

In the public safety committee, we have the Liberal government's plans that are poorly developed, they lack consultations and they often miss the point or have negative consequences and unintended impacts on the Canadian public. The Liberal government has proven that virtue signalling is a bad way to manage a country because it creates more problems than it solves.

Bill C-93 makes its first mistake on the very first line of the bill, "An Act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions." While I am sure the Liberals meant no-fee record suspension, there is no such thing as a no-cost record suspension. The process of suspending

a criminal record costs the taxpayers money, \$630 specifically. It is a cost recovery process in that an individual pays for the administrative costs for an application. Taxpayers will be on the hook for each pardon request, each suspension request. While providing the record suspension for an individual with historical convictions for a minor offence is not a big issue, allocating taxpayer money to the cost of that at a time when millions of Canadians are saying that everyday costs are out of reach, just shows how out of touch the government is to the everyday working Canadian.

This can hardly be called a priority for Canadians and the average Canadian family. That is the main issue I hear from many in the justice and policing community. The priorities of the government seem to be out of step with the needs of Canadians, the needs of our country and the needs of community safety, whether it is in the cities fighting gangs or in rural areas, providing police response to support and fight the rising crime rates. As I have said many times in this place, it must be the top priority of the House of Commons to put protections of Canadians ahead of political priorities, parties and election. Protecting Canadians is far more important than one's political fortunes.

Clearly, this is not the case for the Liberal Prime Minister, his senior cabinet ministers and staffers. While we can draw this conclusion from their priorities in the public safety portfolio, the SNC-Lavalin scandal brought this in clear view.

The Prime Minister, the Clerk of the Privy Council, the Minister of Finance and senior staff, including Gerald Butts and Ben Chin, noted that elections were more of a priority than the independence of our judicial process. Intervening in a criminal prosecution, quite possibly attempting to obstruct justice, and undermining the independence of our justice system was not as important to them as helping out their friends from a Montreal-based employer. "I'm an MP in Quebec" the Prime Minister is said to have responded. Sadly, the few jobs that might have been impacted, and SNC-Lavalin says almost no jobs would be impacted, pales in comparison to the tens of thousands of jobs lost in my province of Alberta in the energy sector.

The Prime Minister is fond of suggesting his words are important, but sadly his actions are found wanting. The priorities of Canadians are not the priorities—

• (1340)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are talking about an issue that is very important and has been raised by many people in my community, and that is the issue of pardons in the context of cannabis legalization.

There is an issue of relevance here as to what the member across is speaking about, which is not at all about the bill before him. I would ask if he could be directed to speak about the bill. It is an important bill and I would like to hear his thoughts.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth for raising the point of order. Members will know, of course, that relevance is indeed one of those standing orders. It is a limit, if you will, on debate in the House. I recognize that the hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner is only about five minutes into his 20-minute speech. I will assure the hon. member that I will listen carefully, and of course, he will be reminded that this is something he will do in the course of his remarks to ensure that they are on the subject that is before the House.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and yes, I would ask my hon. colleague to be patient. I will get to my point forthwith.

The priorities of Canadians are not the priorities of this Liberal Prime Minister and his government, and this could not be more clear than when two former cabinet ministers were removed from their party. They were banished last week, and there was a breakdown in trust. Sadly, the fault lies clearly with the Prime Minister and his cronies, while the penalties continue to be placed on the members who were removed.

The Prime Minister has offered one falsehood after another trying to it explain away. Quite bluntly, it has been painfully obvious to the rest of the country that he put politics ahead of the best interests of Canadians.

The Liberals have tabled their bill for taxpayer-funded records suspensions. There it is; I am back on the issue. How does this align with the needs of Canadians? In general, how does it fit with public safety? The many issues facing our country in protecting our communities and ensuring a strong, fair justice system go well beyond the Prime Minister trying to interfere with the independence of the former attorney general or the director of public prosecutions.

We know where Canada is struggling with public safety. According to Statistics Canada information, Canada has a gang problem in our cities. We have a justice problem, with backlogged courts and court appointments for judges. We have a rural crime problem. We have a sentencing and recidivism problem, with revolving doors in the justice and jail system. We have evidence-lab challenges and RCMP police-resourcing challenges. Stats Canada has shown that gang-related shootings are primarily responsible for recent increases in violent crime in this country, and to date, the only Liberal response has been unfulfilled promises.

Instead of action, the Liberals' legislative changes, like Bill C-71, for example, went after licensed firearms owners instead of criminals. As the Department of Public Safety noted in its own consultation document, the vast majority of licensed firearms owners are not involved in crime. In fact, statistics provided to the public safety committee suggest that it is under 1%. The Liberals' legislative response to gang violence and illegal weapons has been to crack down on less than 1% of the problem and to ignore the 99%.

What would help? I know a number of items that could help improve public safety and reduce violent crime. First is spending the money the government promised for policing and to go after organized crime. Second is to put more resources into public prosecutions, courts and evidence labs. These have all been shown to be under-resourced, especially with the recent court decision to limit

trial length. Third is to stop softening sentences for violent criminals, as proposed in Bill C-75. Serious crime needs serious punishment for reform to work, and all these ideas have evidence to show that they are needed and would have an impact.

What will not have an impact is a taxpayer-funded pot pardon. No one would be safer because of this policy. A very small number of Canadians would benefit from it. The truth, from my experience, is that most individuals likely to seek record suspensions may have a number of other convictions as well. While they may receive a single free record suspension, their other charges may not be so free. Possession might be only one of the many charges on a person's record.

Where would Bill C-93 leave this House and Canada on the constant effort to combat crime in an ever-changing and evolving world? After three and a half years of Liberal mismanagement, we have a strained legal system that sees more and more criminals going free, rather than facing charges, or pleading to significantly less-serious charges.

Prisoners will now have access to needles whenever and wherever they want in prisons. As our correctional officers have told us and have pointed out more than once, even in Europe, which the Liberals claim to be copying, the needles are never in the general population; they are in the hands of medical staff. Rather than dealing with the cause of crime, most often addiction, the Liberal plan is to continue the addiction.

Under the current Liberal government, we have seen a horrific record of protecting communities from returning ISIS fighters. When we asked the committee how many outstanding monitoring warrants were placed on the 60 ISIS terrorists who have returned, the number was zero.

● (1345)

While I have no doubt that teams at CSIS and the RCMP are working to keep tabs on these individuals, and are doing a great job, limited by the legislation from the government, the red tape and oversight rules proposed under Bill C-59 would no doubt make it harder to watch known radical extremists who have participated in horrific, hate-based crimes. To me and many Canadians, a desire to join ISIS is itself an admission that someone supports violence.

The Prime Minister is happy to talk about being opposed to radicals and extremists, but none of his actions suggest that he is serious about combatting the sources of radicalization or the threat of domestic terrorism. Words matter, but actions have impacts.

Government Orders

We have seen a radical and damaging string of policies that have increased drugs in our communities and have not helped make anyone safer. Whether it was the poorly thought-out and rushed legislation on marijuana, which ignored reasonable requests from police and medical professionals, or the unnecessary risk of drug-impaired driving, to my knowledge, we still do not have a reliable roadside mechanism to test for drug impairment or to increase supervised injection sites.

Nothing so explains the potential harm of the Liberal approach to crime as the issue of rural crime, which we are dealing with in rural Canada. My riding has a small city and an expansive rural region. Across Alberta, Saskatchewan and other parts of our country, we have heard from Canadians about the rampant, escalating crime in rural communities committed, for the most part, by urban criminals victimizing rural Canadians where police response is minimal, delayed, or in some cases, nonexistent.

Canadians have told us heartbreaking stories of violent encounters, financial hardship and trauma from repeated thefts and victimization. Canadians have spoken of fear, alienation and abandonment. That is not Canada. That is not my Canada, but it has become an unfortunate reality in the Prime Minister's Canada.

With Bill C-93, the government is proposing a no-fee, no-waiting-period record suspension without any enquiries or reviews of personal history or conduct. The reason we have a Parole Board, both the administration and the regional organization, appointed to conduct hearings is to exercise discretion in the review of individual cases. Parole hearings can uncover vital information about convictions, such as a plea deal with lesser charges despite the person having been involved in serious and violent crimes.

While there are likely to be a very limited number of cases like this, such cases may be separated from simple possession issues. Moreover, some plea deals may have been arranged with lesser charges but with specific instructions, such as an agreement to have no record suspension, as appropriate to the person's personal history.

This means that these pardons would be granted as a matter of process, and the board would take up no inquiry of the person and would have little or no opportunity to exercise discretion. This means that even in cases where it was patently obvious that the person continued a criminal lifestyle but did not have a conviction entered against him or her, a pardon would be granted.

The police in this country have raised some concerns about Bill C-93. They suggest that our officers need to feel confident that individuals who are a threat to public safety and the public order are going to be popping up on CPIC, even if they have been convicted of simple possession.

Here is a scenario as an example. There are many individuals who have been charged with more than one serious criminal drug offence, but once they have gone to court and worked out a plea deal for simple possession for a multitude of possession charges, these charges are then reduced for multiple reasons, such as to ease a court backlog, to save witnesses from testifying or to secure testimony for the conviction of a bigger criminal player, etc. The plea to a simple possession charge would be used by the Crown with the understanding, as I said previously, that the conviction would still be a

permanent part of that individual's record, ensuring that any future investigation of a similar nature could be appropriately linked and applied to that person's own personal history.

• (1350)

This does not serve the best interests of officer safety or community safety. It does not promote the rehabilitation of those entrenched in the criminal element, the ones who threaten to be repeat offenders.

I appreciate the fact that we cannot hold unproven facts against individuals. That would be unfair. However, we cannot ignore the circumstances that would lead to the arrest, charging and conviction of individuals using the available laws and the discretion of the day, which is key. The Crown and the courts would not have accepted the lesser pleas knowing the proposal today. This itself would affect the administration of justice.

There are two very different scenarios at play here: one person who is stopped and charged for carrying a dime bag of marijuana versus a person who is caught up in a drug ring and pleads to a simple possession charge. They are two very different people, but the proposed changes would treat them the same way. One is not a danger to police or the community, and the other continues to pose a risk. That is what should be screened. There should not just be blanket pardons.

While the Liberals are happy to talk about there being discretion in our justice system, they have removed the discretion of the public service at the Parole Board as well as the discretion of the Parole Board itself. It is important to keep in context the arrest charges and plea deals, especially since many plea deals would never have considered the possibility of a future government legalizing drugs and imposing record suspensions without any review or context.

The House should consider that no individuals would benefit from this act who would be excluded otherwise, and I can see no way to make that happen without an appropriate review.

I hope that members of the committee are not prevented from making minor and common-sense amendments to the legislation that would ensure public safety. Already we have seen too many pieces of legislation from the Liberals that ignore common sense and public safety in favour of policy and division.

Statements by Members

To be clear, I know, and I believe members know, that these are not the public safety priorities of Canadians. This bill would not help victims recover from the trauma of violent crime. It would not prevent criminals from victimizing rural Canadians. It would not stop gang violence or deter youth from joining gangs. It would not address illegal firearms in our country. It would not address the many concerns and challenges faced by prosecutors and police across the country.

I see Bill C-93 as a continuation of the Liberals' plan: more minor gestures without the requisite actions to combat addiction, crime and poverty to improve public safety. It is a plan that would provide a benefit to a select and small group of Canadians at taxpayers' expense, a plan that would double down on legalizing marijuana while ignoring real, serious and important threats to Canada's public safety. These are not the priorities of Canadians. This bill does not address the issues, and from what I have heard from police and prosecutors across the country, it does not address their concerns.

I can only assume that Liberal MPs will once again be called on to vote in blind faith with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety, because today more and more Canadians are seeing clearly that the priorities of the Liberals are not the priorities of Canadians.

• (1355)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a pleasure to be on the public safety and national security committee with the member across the way. At committee, we worked together on a joint report on record suspensions, which was tabled in the House in December. We all agreed in the report that a criminal record has a negative impact on a person's ability to find employment, housing and education, to travel and in the adoption and custody of children. We recognized that an applicant's financial situation and ability to pay may be a barrier to applying. In fact, we asked the government to review the record suspension system and the cost of it. Therefore, I was actually very surprised to hear the member now speak from what seems to be a position that is contrary to the report he agreed to when it was put forward in the House.

Perhaps the member could explain why it makes sense for people to face a financial barrier in achieving a record suspension for something like simple possession.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, it is important to realize that there is no dichotomy in what I have said and what I support at committee. I fully appreciate that when moving on in life, an individual's record could limit his or her ability to acquire appropriate employment, housing and all those things. We need to approach this in a manner that is fair and just. That does not mean the taxpayer foots the entire bill. It means there is a balance that has to be struck.

Not once did I suggest that the record suspension should not be considered. I think it is something that needs to be considered. However, we need to look at this. We need to be open to amendments to the current legislation. We need to understand its implications. We need to make sure we do not give record suspensions straight across the board because someone has a minor possession. We need to have the Parole Board continue to examine each file and, where appropriate, issue those suspensions potentially, but not completely, at the taxpayers' expense. As a government, we need to look at that.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have seen a pattern of behaviour by the current government and it is too little too late. It is a lazy approach. It is half-measures. I do not understand the concept the Liberals are proposing now, when the member for Victoria proposed a reasonable bill that had support and could have run through this House. Mediocracy and a lack of willingness to work on things is what really exemplifies the current government.

Here is an example where we have some unification in the House and some half-forward progress presented in front of us and the government has refused to do it. Housing is a good example. It is something that is serious for people. This bill is not going to help people who have been affected by this type of a record historically. I would ask the member to highlight that, because it is a very significant consequence. Again, I cannot understand the half-measures.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, we do see the impact one's past can have on one's present and future.

Although I am new to the House, at times I often wonder why as parliamentarians we cannot come together on legislation of this importance to find a common ground and to be accepting of amendments from all parties who have the best interests of Canadians in mind. I am hopeful that when the bill is sent to committee, the government members will be open to amendments that are designed to better the lives of Canadians.

The Speaker: There will be six minutes remaining in questions and comments when the House next undertakes this topic.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[Translation]

SNC-LAVALIN EMPLOYEES

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 3,500 people in Quebec are at risk of losing their jobs because of the SNC-Lavalin saga. However, in Ottawa, the parties do not care, as we see from the pathetic legal squabble between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The Conservatives are spreading falsehoods without any regard for the 3,500 workers, all of whom they labelled as corrupt last week.

How did the Prime Minister react to all this nonsense? Accused of political interference in a court case, he finds a way to legally interfere in a political case. This is childish. This is not even something you would see in a school yard, and I have seen lots of school yards in my life.

Statements by Members

Quebeckers deserve better from the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition than a cat fight. The Conservatives must stop trying to score political points on the backs of the workers. As for the Liberals, they must stop their legal grandstanding and take action to protect SNC-Lavalin workers.

* * *

[English]

WE STAND MOVEMENT

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a message from Amaan Khandia, a grade seven student at Thomas L. Wells Public School in Scarborough—Rouge Park. He is part of the “We Stand” movement. These are his words, as published by the Toronto Star:

Because of the continuing movement of hate around the world, I feel scared. I have more anxiety than I’ve ever felt before. I feel anxious walking into a place of worship, the mosque, that now has to be guarded by security personnel 24/7....

It feels as if hate and Islamophobia will be a regular part of life forever. My younger brother will have to grow up witnessing even more hate and bigotry. He will have to grow up with the impact of Islamophobia hitting harder than ever.

That is, until we speak up....

Let’s make it a priority to unite and connect with each other, to understand each other and to take down adversities caused by hate within our schools, communities and our world.

Together, we can.

Together, we will.

Together, we stand.

* * *

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the House and of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, I would like to bring the House’s attention to the unjust imprisonment of Dennis Christensen, a prisoner of conscience.

Mr. Christensen is a Jehovah’s Witness and a Danish citizen. In May 2017, he was arrested in Russia along with other members of his faith community. The charges related to nothing more than the peaceful practice of his religion. In February, after appearing in court more than 50 times and a detention of over 600 days, he was sentenced to an additional six years imprisonment for “continuing the activities” of an extremist group.

His arrest is one of the many measures Russia has taken to crack down on Jehovah’s Witnesses, which include Russia’s Supreme Court officially banning it as an extremist organization. This is a gross violation of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Will the Liberal government put the spotlight on Mr. Christensen’s imprisonment and oppose this grotesque assault on religious freedom in Russia?

* * *

PULMONARY FIBROSIS

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pulmonary fibrosis is a very serious lung disease that affects far too many Canadians.

Over 20 years ago, Parvinder Maloni watched as his mother died from this disease. One can imagine how he felt when he was diagnosed with the same disease five years ago. His outlook was not good, and as his condition deteriorated, he received, on Mother’s Day of last year, a life-saving donor lung. Parvinder firmly believes that was by fate of his mother’s intervention.

To honour her, he and his brother Narinder have set up the Parkash Kaur Ahluwalia Maloni Legacy Fund, and to date they have raised \$70,000 for the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation.

I invite all members of the House to join me in congratulating the brothers on the wonderful work they have done to support this excellent cause.

* * *

TAX EVASION

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since we learned from the Panama papers the enormous scale of overseas tax evasion three years ago, \$1.6 billion has been recovered globally, yet there has not been any charges or any convictions in Canada. The minister never tells us how much she has actually collected.

Last week, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said he cannot get the CRA to give him the data to measure how much we are losing to tax evasion and has threatened to take the Liberals to court.

Canadians are fed up with the lack of tax enforcement for the one per cent. Recovered revenue could be used to fund pharmacare, build housing and invest in infrastructure. Nine out of 10 CRA professionals have agreed, “It is easier for corporations and wealthy individuals to evade and/or avoid tax responsibilities than it is for average Canadians.”

Tax experts agree that my private member’s bill, Bill C-362, would help but again the government is silent.

Will the Liberals please get serious about our tax evasion crisis?

* * *

● (1405)

CARBON PRICING

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about our government’s climate action plan.

Canada, as scientists have told us, is warming at twice the rate of the global average. It is important that governments take bold steps. Our government has shown leadership by making polluters pay, while providing a climate action incentive to Canadians. This, according to the former Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, is the right thing to do.

Ironically, while the Conservatives cry that the price on pollution will create havoc, it was Stephen Harper who, in 2008, proposed a carbon tax of \$65 per tonne. Ours is only \$20 a tonne. Talk about hypocrisy.

Statements by Members

Eleven years ago, British Columbia introduced its carbon price and now it has outpaced the rest of Canada in reducing emissions and increasing its economic growth. This is proof that a price on carbon works.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a stretch of bad news for Canadians, all brought on by the Prime Minister and his tax-and-spend government that has delivered another \$20-billion deficit.

This deficit will push each and every Canadian, every senior, every newborn, every veteran and every student over \$500 further in debt. Now the government has doubled down with a punitive carbon tax, a tax that will hit hardest on seniors with fixed incomes and young families that are struggling to balance their household budgets.

It is a tax that will take money out of people's pockets but will do nothing to take pollution out of the air. I have heard from the people in my riding of North Okanagan—Shuswap, and 90% of them are opposed to this carbon tax grab.

It is time for a Conservative government that will end the carbon tax, a Conservative government led by a responsible leader who respects hard-working Canadians, a Conservative government that will let Canadians keep more of their money in their pockets.

* * *

NELLIE CASHMAN

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend of International Women's Day, I attended the world's largest mineral conference, the PDAC in Toronto. I was reminded of an unsung Canadian hero, Nellie Cashman.

In 1869, Cashman was one of the only active women prospectors, and she became one of the most influential voices in the industry. Unfortunately, her amazing story has been sadly forgotten.

Cashman prospected in Canada, the United States, Mexico and South Africa for 52 years. She gained a reputation for bravery and leadership by leading a crew on a 77-day rescue mission, braving snow over 10 feet deep in rugged terrain to help 100 ill prospectors and miners. Her entrepreneurship funded her own prospecting adventures and grubstaked many others.

I stand today, and I hope members will join me, in recognizing Nellie Cashman and calling for her name to be added in the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame.

* * *

[*Translation*]**710 STE-ROSE, ROYAL CANADIAN AIR CADET SQUADRON**

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the pleasure of visiting the 710 Ste-Rose Air Cadet Squadron in Laval, where I attended the commanding officer's parade. The squadron's cadets perfectly executed a musical program in preparation for the annual parade to be held on May 18.

As a former air force major for the air cadet camps at CFB Bagotville, I know that the work of the squadron's commanding officer, Captain Mélanie Paquette, is very important, and I sincerely thank her for her efforts.

I commend all the cadets I had the pleasure to meet for their commitment. I want to repeat for them loud and clear the motto on the badge that they wear so proudly: "Never give up".

* * *

[*English*]**CARBON PRICING**

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, On April 1, the Prime Minister once again increased taxes on Canadians. This time he added another tax, which was, as members can guess, the carbon tax. My constituents in Niagara West and Canadians across the country are now paying more for virtually everything: gas, propane, groceries, home heating and much more.

Because of the carbon tax, gas has already gone up by 5¢ a litre. In a vast riding like mine, where public transit is limited, constituents have no choice but to drive their kids to practice after school or to work.

What are the Liberals going to do with all this new carbon tax money from my constituents and ordinary Canadians? Well, today the Liberals gave us a sneak preview of things to come. They gave \$12 million of it to Loblaws stores so that the stores could retrofit refrigerators.

It seems like the Liberals have no problem raising taxes on ordinary families, only to give the money to their corporate billionaire friends. It is obvious that the carbon tax is a cash grab, plain and simple.

Make no mistake: A conservative government will scrap the Liberal carbon tax and help Canadians keep their hard-earned dollars where they belong, which is in their wallets.

* * *

●(1410)

ARMENIA

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 24, we remember and honour the lives of the more than 1.5 million Armenians who were killed during the Armenian genocide.

In remembering this atrocity, we work to recognize, understand and prevent genocide around the world today. All nations must recognize genocide and hate as an issue for humanity, one that we must confront.

The victims' memories are desecrated by many people who actively deny that these horrific events occurred and who perpetrate hate today. We must recommit ourselves to making genocide history, never to happen again.

Statements by Members

I want to say to the Armenian community in Cambridge and across Canada and to Armenians around the world that I stand with them in recognizing, remembering and proclaiming, “never again”.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):

[Member spoke in Punjabi.]

[English]

Mr. Speaker, today in Ottawa we celebrated the annual Vaisakhi on the Hill. On April 20, in my riding of Surrey—Newton, half a million people from all backgrounds will come together to celebrate the birth of Khalsa. As the host MP for the largest Vaisakhi and Khalsa Day parade outside of India, it is my honour to recognize this important occasion.

This annual event, championed by Dasmesh Darbar Gurdwara, shows the strength of our diversity and our country. It is moments like these that I want celebrated across Canada, with the passage of my bill to recognize April as Sikh heritage month.

As Canadians, we are one people, with one history and a shared future. On April 20, I invite all members of the House and all Canadians to join me in celebrating this unique and amazing event.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, 338 young Canadian women sat in this place. Although a small Conservative cohort was chosen, these principled, intelligent, articulate Conservative women made their mark with grace and tenacity in the midst of adversity.

Along with her colleagues, Kaitlyn Kitzan, a University of Saskatchewan agribusiness student and third-generation cattle and grain farmer from my riding of Yorkton—Melville, made us proud. She spoke to the plight of our farmers facing international trade disputes, transportation issues and harmful environmental policies.

It is time that the Liberals admit they have ignored the world-class sustainable practices of our Canadian farmers. Their transportation policies are not helping our landlocked resources and products. The Liberals fail to champion the high quality of our canola because of their ineptness on the international stage. Our farmers are gearing up, ready to seed, and they have had the ground pulled out from under them.

This is another international debacle, another blow to Canadian agriculture in another failure for the Liberal government.

* * *

[Translation]

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is “BeADonor” Month.

April 7 is recognized as Green Shirt Day in Canada in honour of Logan Boulet. He gave the ultimate gift and helped save six lives by

donating his organs and inspired 100,000 people to register as organ donors.

[English]

Each year, 200 Canadians on the organ recipient list die waiting for a second chance. However, a hero emerged in Logan. Facing unspeakable loss, the Boulet family saved lives.

Many individuals and families live with pain and anxiety every day, hoping that a selfless act will allow them a second chance. I ask all Canadians to take charge, find their courage, channel their inner hero and have this conversation at the kitchen table with their family.

There are no more excuses. It takes two minutes. Please register to be a donor today.

* * *

● (1415)

DAUGHTERS OF THE VOTE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what a week it was last week: 338 young women took over Parliament. Three hundred and thirty-eight strong, passionate voices came to the House of Commons for Daughters of the Vote and spoke truth to power, either in silent protest, dignified, or in raising issues that need answers.

As much as we gained from them, all Canadians were able to gain so much more. These young women came here, and one of them, Megan Metz, who represented Skeena—Bulkley Valley, a young, powerful Haisla woman, talked of meeting the former attorney general. This is what she told Canadians:

It was really awesome to see people that looked like me—that had regalia on, that also had traditional bracelets. It was really...empowering.

I was really upset...overwhelmed...and like maybe [I] don't have a place here [when she was removed] but...seeing how many supporters we have, I do [believe I] belong here and we do have a place.

Yes, Megan does have a place here, and we should work a lot harder to make sure that many people like her join us in the House of Commons.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister cannot kick the Leader of the Opposition out of his cabinet or caucus, we found out yesterday that he is suing him for having the audacity to question the Prime Minister's role in the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

Now, I have seen the opposition leader's criticisms about the Prime Minister's many failures, such as an embarrassing trip to India, breaking ethics laws, paying \$10.5 million to a convicted terrorist and how he is failing our veterans.

Oral Questions

Since the Leader of the Opposition is clearly renting a lot of space in the Prime Minister's head, I have some suggestions on things he can do to make some room. One, the Prime Minister should immediately unfriend him on Facebook, block him on Twitter and unfollow him on Instagram. Two, stop the thought of taking any selfies, because we know that will show him how upset the Prime Minister really is.

If these actions do not stop the Leader of the Opposition, there is always the option to apply his admiration of a basic dictatorship and place the opposition leader under house arrest.

* * *

BONE MARROW DONATION

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to speak about bone marrow donation and to raise awareness for the worldwide bone marrow donor registry.

In my riding of Brampton South, the charity organization, Match for Marrow, increases awareness about this need. This wonderful organization was born when Jasnoor Deol was diagnosed nine years ago and his family wanted to help others like him. He has been waiting for nine years for a transplant and still no donor.

His mother Inderjit, his sister Simrat and their entire team are here today to celebrate Vaisakhi on the Hill. At the health committee, I hear a lot about how registries and better data can save lives and improve care. I will continue to support their efforts to raise awareness of the bone marrow registry. This work deserves to be honoured by everyone in this House.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for months now, the Prime Minister has done everything he can to avoid accountability in his handling of the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal. Now he has indicated that he intends to sue me to stop my criticisms of his government's actions. Canadians are looking forward to this. Canadians are looking forward to the Prime Minister finally appearing under oath and testifying in a setting that he cannot control himself.

Can the government inform the House on what date these court proceedings will commence?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives, and frankly their leader, have a history of making untrue and defamatory statements for political gain.

In response to a lawyer's letter in December, the Conservative leader deleted tweets that were defamatory to the Minister of Innovation. We put him on notice again, because there are consequences for making false statements. At his press conference, he has already refrained from repeating some of his false statements. He should not be misleading Canadians.

Here is a question to the Leader of the Opposition that Canadians want to know about. Has he deleted tweets since he received that notice?

• (1420)

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they asked a yes-or-no question, and I can answer a yes-or-no question. No, I have not deleted tweets, because I stand by everything that I said in those statements.

[Translation]

The reality is that the Prime Minister led a campaign of interference and is now trying to silence his adversaries. Canadians deserve answers without the Prime Minister trying to obstruct the questions.

When will the Prime Minister proceed with his lawsuit?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the response from the Leader of the Opposition shows yet again why we had to put him on notice. On March 31, the day he received that letter, he deleted and changed one of his defamatory tweets. He did the same thing with another defamatory statement he made on February 11. We will not stay silent while the opposition leader misleads Canadians. That is not how things are done in the House or in our country.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader wants to talk about falsehoods. Let us run down a few of them. The Prime Minister said that the former attorney general never came to him with her concerns. That turned out to be false. The Prime Minister said that he never put pressure on the former attorney general to change her decision. That turned out to be false. The Prime Minister said that he had no idea about the phone call between the Clerk of the Privy Council and the former attorney general. That turned out to be a falsehood as well.

Is the Prime Minister aware of what the consequences are for saying falsehoods under oath in court?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition pretends that he will not back down and he tries to make a show out of it, but that word he just used is quite peculiar. Canadians have noticed that he has been editing and changing his tweets once he was put on notice. The leader of the official opposition and the Conservatives know very well that there are consequences for intentionally misleading Canadians. It is not suitable.

We know that is false, because while he is saying that, he has already been editing online statements or erasing them entirely, and backpedalling during his press conferences, just like he did yesterday. This past December, he was again forced to take down a statement—

Mr. David Anderson: They are supposed to be the government—

The Speaker: I ask members to be judicious with their comments.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Oral Questions

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader knows that is just not true. I stand by everything I said in that statement.

However, here is what we do know. The Prime Minister has done everything he can to try to shut down criticism. He has shut down two parliamentary investigations. He used his majority in the House to block calls for a public inquiry, and he kicked two members out of his caucus for the sole crime of telling the truth, all to cover up his corruption.

Once again, if the government House leader is so sure that the Liberals have such a firm case, when will they start court proceedings?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that we will not stand idly by while the Conservatives continue to intentionally mislead Canadians. It is not what the obligations of the leader of the official opposition or any elected official should be. The leader of the official opposition on numerous occasions, as I have mentioned, has edited and deleted those tweets. However, the one tweet that the Conservative leader will not change is the one of him attending the same rally as white supremacist Faith Goldy. It is quite interesting when he chooses to make changes and when he does not.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. leader of the opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is nothing but a disgusting attempt to deflect from their own despicable handling of this affair. We will always denounce those who promote hateful ideologies while we stand up for energy workers who are fighting for their jobs.

Again, if the government is so sure of its case, why can the government House leader not inform the House on what day the Prime Minister will show up in court under oath?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated clearly, yes, we have again put the Conservatives on notice because they are intentionally misleading Canadians. We have seen that on March 31, the exact day when he received this letter, he deleted and then edited one of his defamatory tweets.

The leader of the official opposition and his team of these Conservatives did the same thing when they were put on notice by the Minister of Innovation. They continue to mislead Canadians in this House and they try to do it outside of this House, but what they did when they were served notice was change those comments. When it comes to the presence of Faith Goldy, he will not do such a thing.

• (1425)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Markham—Stouffville described how the Prime Minister went from saying that there was nothing about the allegations and to saying they do not really matter. She disagreed and said that “I believe it does matter...that this attempted interference took place”, and she was kicked out for speaking out.

This is about a powerful corporation given special access and about interfering in criminal cases. Will the Prime Minister promise that Liberals will not politically interfere with the decisions of Canada's top prosecutor?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to this matter, first of all, members of the justice committee had set the parameters to have this conversation. They actually invited witnesses to appear. Witnesses appeared and responded to those questions. All the testimony is now public, because the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence.

I know that the member is new to this place, but I encourage him to really look at the record when it comes to the votes that took place. He should know that when it comes to the public prosecutor, there is no possibility of political interference.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, five former attorneys general were so concerned that they wrote to the RCMP calling for an investigation.

A Toronto lawyer has also just written to the RCMP commissioner to urge a criminal investigation into the Prime Minister's potential interference. Now more than ever, people want to know what happened.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to call a public inquiry?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights did their job. They invited witnesses to testify, and those witnesses appeared. The facts are all out in the open because the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence.

The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating. We must respect our institutions. On this side of the House, we respect them and know that they are working. I encourage the member opposite to have a little faith as well.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to a new survey, the majority of Canadians are concerned about the impact of plastic waste on the environment and think that the Liberals need to do more.

The NDP has already announced that it will ban single-use plastics by 2022. Other countries are already taking action.

When will the Liberals take real action to combat plastic pollution?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, personally, I am very proud of what our government is doing.

We took a leadership role in the G7. We have worked with other countries and with businesses to develop a charter on plastic pollution. We know that we are facing a major challenge. We are also working with the provinces and territories to develop a national zero plastic waste strategy. We all need to work together.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need to ban single-use plastics, as 1.6 billion plastic coffee cups sit in Canadian landfills. Nearly eight million plastic bags are thrown away daily. The science is clear that plastic pollution is threatening our ecosystem, our food supply and the very health of Canadians, yet the Liberals refuse to stand up to plastic producers. It seems the Liberals cannot even stand up to any powerful corporation.

Will the Prime Minister stand with us and ban single-use plastics by 2022?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we hosted the G7, we took a leadership role. We said that we need to ensure that we do not have more plastic pollution in our oceans than fish by weight by 2050. That is why we brought in the ocean plastics charter, which sets clear targets for countries around the world. That is why we are supporting developing countries that need support with their waste treatment facilities so that we do not end up with plastic pollution. That is why we are meeting with provinces and territories and working with businesses to have a zero plastic waste strategy. We need to be working with provinces. We need to be working with cities and we need to be working with Canadians.

We banned microbeads July 1, 2018, and we need to keep on doing—

• (1430)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister shut down two committees, booted two MPs out of caucus, and is holding documents 200 days past the deadline of an access to information request to hide the truth from Canadians. After months of misleading contradictions and changing his story to cover up his wrongdoing, now he is trying to shut down the opposition by threatening a lawsuit against our leader.

Canadians look forward to the Prime Minister giving evidence, providing testimony and being accountable, finally, under oath in open court. When will the Prime Minister follow through on his threat?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians always know that we will not stand idly by while the Conservatives intentionally mislead Canadians.

The Conservatives and the leader of the official opposition have a history of doing this. That is exactly why the day that they were served notice—that very same day, on March 31—they deleted and edited a tweet because they know that they should be more judicious when it comes to their word choices. That is exactly the same thing

Oral Questions

that he did when the Minister of Innovation put him on notice in December.

The member might not know the court of law, but she should know that by providing him notice, the process has already begun.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I heard many, many comments from my friend, the hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope, during that answer. I think he knows that we like to hear from him, but only when he has the floor. He will get his chance in due course, probably.

The hon. member for Lakeland.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister admires basic dictatorships, but what is clear from that answer is that he does not really want to follow through with his empty threat, because it would mean that he and his senior staff and multiple officials would have to testify under oath for hours and produce documents, all under a public process that he does not control. Conservatives welcome the chance to examine the Prime Minister in pretrial discovery at the earliest possible date.

Will the Prime Minister follow through on his threat to sue, or is he ready to admit that everything the Leader of the Opposition said is actually true?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because the Conservatives and their leader have a history of making untrue and defamatory statements just for political gains, yes, we have again put them on notice. When they were first put on notice, the leader of the official opposition deleted and then edited tweets because he knew that those comments were not appropriate and he knew that legal action could be taken.

Anyone who knows the court system would know that the first step is putting them on notice. Therefore, the process has already begun. We will not idly stand by while the Conservatives mislead Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister does not like what he is hearing from people who do not agree with him, he kicks them out of his caucus.

Now he is using a new tactic. He is suing people to silence them. If the Prime Minister thinks he can intimidate the Leader of the Opposition or silence us, he is dead wrong.

When will he proceed with his lawsuit?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will not stay silent while the Leader of the Opposition misleads Canadians. The process has begun, and that is why we sent that letter.

Oral Questions

When the Leader of the Opposition received the letter, he changed his tweets. He knows very well that the letter has consequences. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to make comments that mislead Canadians who do not know the truth, we will put him on notice to let him know that he cannot do that.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first the Prime Minister denied the facts, then he changed his story every week, then he kicked out two upstanding ministers because they did not agree with him, and now he is threatening a lawsuit to intimidate and try to silence the opposition.

The Prime Minister is dead wrong if he thinks that his new tactic will work. If he has nothing to hide, he should follow through on his threat, present the evidence and testify under oath.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition pretends that he will not back down and tries to make a show out of it. We know that this is not true, because while he is saying it, he has already edited or deleted his online statements and refuses to repeat his statements in press conferences.

This past December, he was again forced to delete a statement that was defamatory to the Minister of Innovation. False statements also have consequences. This is why, once again, we put the Leader of the Opposition on notice.

• (1435)

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister clearly has no problem getting his way when he threatens his own caucus, but it does not work on Conservatives. He put a gag order on the former attorney general, but he cannot muzzle Conservatives. He shut down two committee investigations into his interference in an ongoing criminal proceeding, but he cannot shut down Conservative questions.

We look forward to the Prime Minister giving testimony under oath, in court, where he faces real consequences if he does not tell the truth.

We will see him in court. When do we start?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will once again confirm that yes, we again have put the leader of the official opposition and these Conservatives on notice. On March 31, the exact day when he received this letter, he deleted and then edited one of his defamatory tweets. There is a repetitive behaviour here.

This is something that the Conservatives have done on numerous occasions. He did the same thing with another defamatory statement he posted on February 11, another time that we had to serve him notice. When the Conservative leader continues to make false statements outside the House, he must be called out. We will call him out to ensure that he does not mislead Canadians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am getting constant chatter over here during answers. I should not be hearing that. Members know that each side gets to have their turn, and that is important in this system, in our democracy. Members need to respect the fact that others may have

different views and different things to say than they might, but we still have to listen to all of them.

The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has found the elusive edit button on Twitter, which does not exist. People cannot edit tweets.

The Liberals should be terrified of the Liberal Prime Minister appearing in court under oath to testify. Only last week, he testified in the House and admitted that the former attorney general had brought her concerns of his political interference to him directly. Canadians want to know what other truths he has been hiding.

When will the Prime Minister follow through on his notice and see us in court?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has just once again proved my point, because every time I have answered I have said that the leader of the official opposition has deleted and then edited the wording of those tweets. He knows that very well, because that is exactly what I said.

The Conservatives will never let the facts get in the way of misleading Canadians. They act tough, but they are already going back and changing their online statements, and Canadians can see that for themselves. They did it on March 31 when they were served notice. They did it on February 11 when the Minister of Innovation served them notice. The only tweet that the Conservatives will not change is their affiliation with Faith Goldy. They seem to be very proud when it comes to those actions.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a decision was made to leak confidential information about Chief Justice Joyal's Supreme Court application. This is a very serious breach of legal obligations, but the leak went further by trashing his reputation, insinuating that he was a Harper ideologue who would undermine the charter. This was baseless and without merit.

Justice Joyal's privacy and reputation were treated as cannon fodder in the Prime Minister's ongoing attempt to smear the former attorney general. Very few people had access to that information, so who gave the order to spread the smear and who leaked the information?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should have complete confidence in the administration of justice. Our nomination process to the Supreme Court is solid and merit-based. It considers Canada's finest jurists for the short list.

As I said, I am deeply troubled by the publication of personal details for the most recent selection process and will ensure in any upcoming processes that this does not happen.

Oral Questions

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really like the minister. I hope he will not sue me for pointing out that there is a dumpster fire going on behind him.

Let me refer to the former president of the Treasury Board, who said that what we were dealing with were fundamental questions of the Constitution, ethical behaviour and leadership. She says, “Canadians deserve to know that someone takes responsibility.” Responsibility, I know that has been a very hard word for our Prime Minister, but we are talking about the rule of law here.

Let us try this again. Could the Attorney General tell us who gave the order to leak the information, to smear the former attorney general and Chief Justice Joyal? Who did it?

• (1440)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the integrity of our process depends on the confidentiality of all the parties involved. As I have stated, I am troubled by the publication of personal details. It is unfair, to any of the parties involved, when this kind of personal information is weaponized for political reasons.

I am confident that the leak did not come from my office, and the Prime Minister has already stated that it did not come from his office.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 7, the Prime Minister told us that the Globe and Mail story was untrue, but we are finally seeing real progress on the Prime Minister's corruption case. He is so scared that he is trying to intimidate the Leader of the Opposition with threats of legal action. He hid the truth from Canadians for months, but the whole truth may finally come to light in court. The Prime Minister will have to present his evidence and testify. He will no longer be able to hide.

Can the Prime Minister provide assurances that he has ordered all documents related to this corruption scandal to be preserved in preparation for the trial?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to ensure that Canadians could hear for themselves, the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence. We know the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights did their job. We know the Ethics Commissioner is investigating, but there is more. We know that the Conservatives keep stirring the pot and that they are doing it on purpose. We know we served the Leader of the Opposition notice. When he received it, he deleted and changed his tweets.

The Speaker: I have been hearing a lot from the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier today when it is not his turn to speak. He knows he has to wait until I give him the floor.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader likes talking about tweets, but what happened is that the Prime Minister put the Leader of the Opposition on notice in order to silence him. The Prime Minister has a habit of trying to silence people. The truth is

not important to him. He is hiding because he knows that what the Leader of the Opposition is saying is true. The Prime Minister is not scaring anyone with his threats. We will not stop talking about his corruption and demanding the truth.

Now that the Prime Minister wants to take this before the courts, we want to know whether he kept all the documentation needed for the trial.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. On March 31, the same day the Leader of the Opposition received the letter, he deleted and then edited one of his defamatory tweets. He did the same thing with another defamatory statement he made on February 11. We will not stand idly by while the Leader of the Opposition misleads Canadians. Canadians can see that the only tweet the opposition leader did not change is the one regarding his affiliation with Faith Goldy.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's threatened lawsuit is a classic SLAPP suit, a strategic lawsuit against public participation. The Prime Minister is clearly attempting to censor, silence and intimidate, without intending to proceed. However, if he actually does, the Prime Minister should proceed quickly. The Leader of the Opposition has invited him to “Bring it on.”

Could the Prime Minister assure the House that he has ordered retention of all documents related to the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it should be once again stated that to ensure Canadians could hear the truth for themselves, it was actually the Prime Minister and this government that waived solicitor-client privilege, as well as cabinet confidence. It should also be noted that it was the first time in the history of our country that this had been done. It is important that Canadians be able to hear the truth.

However, it is not the first time the Conservatives are misleading Canadians. That is exactly why Conservatives have been put on notice. The same day, March 31, that they received notice, the Leader of the Opposition deleted and then edited his tweets. It is the same thing he did on February 11, after the Minister of Innovation had served him notice.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after months of hiding the truth from Canadians about his corrupt conduct and fraudulent excuses, the Prime Minister himself has created an opportunity to come clean. The PM is obviously trying to intimidate the Leader of the Opposition with the threat of a lawsuit, with no intention of proceeding. Because if he did, the PM would have to present his evidence and finally testify under oath.

Therefore, might I respectfully suggest that it is time for the PM to put up or shut up.

• (1445)

The Speaker: I of course will encourage my hon. friend from Thornhill to be judicious in his choice of wording.

The hon. government House leader.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Thornhill should not only be judicious of his words, but he should have respect for this chamber and should retract those comments.

When it comes to the Prime Minister of Canada or any prime minister, whether I have agreed with them or not, they are the Prime Minister of our country and we should be proud of our democratic institutions. These individuals are elected by people and we should be respectful of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Unfortunately, that is something the member and the Conservatives are lacking. It is interesting to see that all of a sudden they have a newfound respect for our institutions.

When it comes to the justice committee, it did its work. When it comes to the officer—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Jonquière.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a report by the Canadian International Trade Tribunal has found that the Trump administration's unfair tariffs on steel are not justified. We know for a fact that this is also the case for aluminum tariffs.

Workers are not going to be able to absorb the cost indefinitely. The Minister of Finance has the authority to overrule the tribunal's decision. The Liberals must take action and impose permanent safeguard measures to protect our jobs in the steel and aluminum sectors. This is urgent.

Will the minister finally help these workers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the illegal and unjust American tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum must be lifted. We consistently send this message to the United States, including at a meeting I had with Secretary of State Pompeo last Wednesday.

American legislators, both Republicans and Democrats, and a dozen U.S. industries have asked Ambassador Lighthizer to lift the tariffs.

[English]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week steelworkers received the shocking ruling from the trade tribunal that safeguard measures would not be permanently imposed. Workers have already lost hundreds of jobs under the unfair steel tariffs imposed by Trump and they cannot believe that the Liberals signed the new NAFTA with them in place.

Remember when the Prime Minister told steelworkers in Hamilton that he had their backs? Now is the time to show it. The Liberal government is not doing enough to end the illegal dumping of cheap and dirty steel, and steelworkers are fed up.

Will the finance minister immediately impose permanent safeguard measures to protect steel jobs, yes or no?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was our government

that took a leadership role in introducing those safeguards. Above and beyond that, we introduced two billion dollars' worth of support for our steel and aluminum workers.

We understand that these unjust and unfair tariffs imposed by the Americans are completely unacceptable. We will continue to defend our steel and aluminum workers. We have been there with them. We have made investments in large producers, while supporting small and medium-sized businesses as well. We will continue to defend the sector.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is a good day for corporate social responsibility in Canada. In the 10 years since the introduction and ultimate defeat of Bill C-300, the responsible mining bill, Canada has evolved from a strong resistance to naming an ombudsman for the Canadian office of responsible enterprise. This office will help support Canadian companies around the world to operate in accordance with international human rights standards.

Could the Minister of International Trade update the House on the appointment of the ombudsperson and the establishment of her mandate?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of International Trade Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood for his leadership, tenacity and perseverance for more than a decade on this file.

Today, I announced the appointment of Sheri Meyerhoffer as the first-ever Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise. This office is the first of its kind in the world. The ombudsperson will ensure that Canadian firms operating abroad maintain the highest ethical practices. This solidifies our competitive edge and promotes Canada's strong leadership on the global stage.

* * *

● (1450)

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it emerged yesterday that after orchestrating a sustained campaign to put pressure on the former attorney general, the chief strategist and Liberal Prime Minister is resorting to intimidation to silence the Leader of the Opposition.

Writing about the Prime Minister's attitude, Emmanuelle Latraverse said that he is like a teenager who would rather party than buckle down and hit the books. She said that on this file, the Prime Minister got an F in governance and transparency.

The Leader of the Opposition is ready.

When does the Prime Minister plan to make good on his threat? Will he testify in court so that Canadians can hear the whole truth?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to ensure that Canadians heard the whole truth, the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence. That is exactly why all of the facts are now public.

We put the Leader of the Opposition on notice again. On March 31, the exact day when he received our letter, he deleted and edited one of his defamatory tweets. He did the same thing with another defamatory tweet he posted on February 11.

Last week, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable asked for an emergency debate on canola. Today, he is not asking—

The Speaker: The member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have good news: The Prime Minister cannot fire the Leader of the Opposition, but Canadians will be able to fire the Prime Minister on October 21. That is what the Prime Minister deserves for trying to muzzle the Leader of the Opposition.

A real leader takes full responsibility, as the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle does. That is what a real leader does. Canadians deserve the truth. In court, lies have consequences.

After all these intimidation theatrics, will the Prime Minister cave or will he testify?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since my colleague has answered that question several times now and I know that my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable is very interested in the canola file, I am pleased to take this opportunity to tell him that I am working closely with the task force. In fact, the first meeting was last Thursday.

I am in constant contact with our provincial partners and industry. I have asked that a delegation of scientists go to China. I will be getting a response shortly.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing here today is the Liberal government reacting to the fact that it sent out this letter threatening the Leader of the Opposition for, basically, doing his job. It is trying to get the Conservatives to back down so he does not have to, because the Liberals know how crazy this is. They know Canadians are watching this and are incensed.

I am here to say that we are not backing down. The Leader of the Opposition just stood up and said that he stood behind everything he said. When is the Prime Minister going to show up in court?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps that is exactly why the leader of the official opposition and the Conservatives have been given notice once again. It is not their job to mislead Canadians. It is our job to ensure that we work in the best interest of Canadians.

What has happened? On February 11, the leader of the official opposition changed his statement online after he had been served notice from the Minister of Innovation. On March 31, he was served notice once again, and what did the leader of the official opposition do? He deleted and then edited those tweets. All of a sudden he

realized that he should be more judicious in his wording. The only tweet the Conservatives will not change is the one that affiliates them to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my party leader has said that he stands behind everything he said. The interesting thing with the House leader saying that false statements have consequences is that it does not apply to her leader. She never came to him. He never put pressure on her. No one from his office directed her to do anything.

Why are the only people who have any sort of consequences for false statements are strong women in his party? When she is saying, “Put us on notice”, right back at you, Mr. Speaker. Giddy-up.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition pretends that he will not back down, then he tries to make a show of it. He even has his own members now parroting those same lines. We know that is false because while he is saying that, he has already edited his online statements or erased them entirely.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1455)

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Calgary Nose Hill appeared to ask me to giddy-up. I do not think she meant that. Members should calm down a little and listen to the answer.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we know those statements are false because their actions demonstrate differently. While they are making those comments, he has already edited his online statements and also, on numerous occasions now, erased them entirely, and is backpedalling during press conferences, like we saw just yesterday. This past December, he was again forced to take down a statement when it came to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for two years, the National Arts Centre asked the Liberals to fund an indigenous theatre program to tell the stories of indigenous peoples. Last week, it was announced that the Liberals denied funding again. Let us be clear. We are talking about the only national indigenous theatre program in the world. When asked, the Minister of Canadian Heritage pointed out that the government already spent money on the NAC, clearly not understanding that investing in indigenous arts and culture is not the same as renovations.

Does the Liberal government look for new and creative ways to insult indigenous peoples or does it just come by them naturally?

Oral Questions

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of Conservative cuts, we are making historic investments in our arts and our creators. We are investing in indigenous cultures through indigenous languages, the Indigenous Screen Office, the National Film Board, Telefilm Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and indigenous festivals. We have also invested \$225 million to renew the National Arts Centre. Together, we will continue to move toward reconciliation.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 42% of children up to the age of four already have their own tablet to watch what used to be called television. It does not take a genius to realize that these young streamers are watching less Quebec and francophone content. With each passing day, the next generation is losing more and more of their cultural roots. The truth is, we are at risk of becoming another Louisiana. The cultural community is calling on the government to take urgent action to ensure that Canadian media and digital platforms everywhere evolve following the same rules.

Will the government finally take urgent action to protect our culture before the end of its mandate and before we disappear?

[English]

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my friend for his dedication to this file in the heritage committee. I commend him on his dedication to asking the same question again and again, and I will provide the same answer. He knows the answer. The answer is that for 10 years, the Conservative Party failed to fund the arts in Canada. As a result, our laws governing this subject matter predate the Internet, so we created a panel of independent experts to help us modernize the Broadcasting Act and the Telecommunications Act. Our end goal is clear. There will be no free rides.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in February, the Prime Minister looked 37 million Canadians in the eye and said his former attorney general had never raised any concerns about his political interference in the SNC-Lavalin corruption trial. Last week, he admitted that she looked him in the eye and did exactly that.

The Prime Minister will be the star witness in his forthcoming lawsuit. Does he know that it is a crime to lie under oath?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I seem to have a greater respect for this institution and that is exactly why I am a lot more judicious in my words. The Conservatives, on numerous occasions, have misled Canadians and that is exactly why they have been put on notice. They were put on notice in the past and that is exactly why the leader of the official opposition went to Twitter, went to his online statements, took them down, edited them and put them back up. On March 31, this is exactly what he did.

The leader of the official opposition, who is now taunting me, wants to know how the steps work. The first step of any court case is to put the Conservatives on notice. They have been put on notice.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if anything she just said is true, she can document it and submit it as part of the lawsuit that the Prime Minister is launching later today. He has to know this before he does that, though. He said The Globe and Mail story about his political interference in the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal was absolutely false, so said he. We now know from text messages, journal entries and recorded conversations it was absolutely true.

Again, does the Prime Minister know it is a crime to lie under oath in a court of law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I found the beginning of the member's question quite patronizing and I always expect a lot more from the member for Carleton. He has been in this place for a long time. He knows I appreciate his line of questioning and the effort he puts to doing the important work that we do here.

For Canadians to be able to decide for themselves, the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege, as well as cabinet confidence. Canadians should be able to hear and that is why the Prime Minister took an unprecedented move. We have full confidence in our institutions. Yes, we do know the rule of law. That is why it was followed at every single step. That is why all facts are now public. The Conservatives continue—

● (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told the former attorney general in September and then Canadians in February that if SNC-Lavalin was forced to go to trial over its fraud and bribery charges, the headquarters and the whole company would leave Canada. We now know that is not only untrue, but impossible, based on an agreement with the Quebec pension plan requiring it to stay for at least seven years.

Once again, the Prime Minister will be the star witness in the forthcoming lawsuit that he is launching with the Leader of the Opposition. Does he know that lying under oath in a court is a crime?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that every Canadian knows that it is important that we follow the rule of law. I would hope that every Canadian knows that we can have confidence in our institutions.

Oral Questions

That is why the work that the justice committee did was so important. That is why when it comes to our officers of Parliament we should have respect and regard for their important work. That is why the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. We have confidence that his office will be able to do its important work.

We have confidence in our institutions. We know that the testimony at the justice committee confirmed that Canadians can have confidence in their institutions as well.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is reducing export bottlenecks and helping Canadian businesses take advantage of new markets.

In the Niagara region alone, we have seen over \$2 million in investments to upgrades to the Peace Bridge with respect to its crossing infrastructure to ensure that it continues to serve the people—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise. Members ought to respect the right of other members to speak and to say things they might not agree with, because they want to be heard when they speak.

The hon. member for Niagara Centre has the floor.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Mr. Speaker, as well, the greater Canadian economy depends on these investments and we thank the minister for that.

Could the minister please update us on further progress made to improve trade corridors across our great nation?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the national trade corridors fund, we have funded 39 projects worth over \$800 million.

For example, on 50th Street in Edmonton, we are now ensuring vertical separation between road and rail traffic. In New Brunswick on Coles Island, we are rebuilding two bridges to allow heavy traffic to pass. In the Lower Mainland of B.C., we are doing all sorts of projects to ensure greater efficiency in rail and car movement across that lower region.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my friend, our friend, David Saint-Jacques, on his first space walk.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals want to turn the page on SNC but instead they keep throwing fuel on the fire. Now the Prime Minister is threatening the Leader of the Opposition with a defamation lawsuit. However, this is not a threat. It is good news. The Prime Minister would finally have to tell the truth under oath. Canadians deserve the truth.

When will the Prime Minister bring this scandal before a judge, or is he afraid his changing story will fall apart in a court of law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians hear the truth and that is exactly why the leader of the official opposition and the Conservatives have again been put on notice. They are misleading Canadians and we will not stand idly by.

This is not the first time they have done this. They have been put on notice in the past and that is exactly why they changed their online statements. It is why they deleted and then edited tweets.

On March 31, just last week, they were again provided notice and that is exactly why the leader of the official opposition deleted and then edited his tweets, because he was put on notice. He knows better than to be misleading Canadians.

Once again, we will not stand idly by while the Conservatives—

The Speaker: The hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the Liberal government began taxing veterans' career impact allowances as capital gains.

Veterans can no longer split that income with their spouses, which for some means going from receiving a \$4,000 tax rebate to owing the government \$800. VAC has corrected some cases and refused to fix others. Veterans should not be caught up in the middle of government departments not wanting to take responsibility for their mistakes.

Will the Liberals commit to fixing this for all veterans?

• (1505)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the well-being of veterans and their families is a priority for us, as my colleague opposite is well aware. Benefits and indexation are also part of that. We are taking this issue very seriously and we will compensate all veterans fairly.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every day, public safety officers put their safety at risk to help and protect Canadians. As a result, they are often exposed to dangerous and traumatic situations that may lead to post-traumatic stress injuries. Public safety officers and their employers are struggling to respond adequately.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Public Safety explain to the House the steps that he has taken to help public safety officers find the treatment they need?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in addressing the mental health needs of the emergency workers who protect Canadians, there is always much more that we can do together. A national PTSD action plan, released today, will support prevention, early intervention, stigma reduction, care and treatment for all types of public safety personnel right across the country. It lays the foundation for better, more accessible treatments for PTSD. It is based upon a \$40-million investment in research and a \$5-billion transfer to provinces and territories to improve mental health services across the country. This is an issue we need to treat seriously.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for months, the Prime Minister has been trying to keep the truth from Canadians. He expelled two women from his caucus who refused to co-operate with his cover-up and now he is threatening lawsuits to try to silence his opponents.

His intimidation will not work. Canadians want the Prime Minister to present his evidence and testify under oath in the court of law. When will the Prime Minister follow through on this threat, or is he all talk and no action?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the process has begun. That is exactly why we sent the Conservatives a letter. Canadians know that the current Conservatives and this leader of the official opposition have a history of misleading Canadians.

Last week, they were provided notice on March 31. After they received that notice, they deleted and then edited tweets online to become, all of a sudden, more judicious in their wording. It is not the first time that they did this. The last time they were served notice, in December, was another time when they went online and deleted their online statements as well as their tweets.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to secularism, tone is just as important as substance. Well, the problems have already begun.

On Friday, the mayor of Hampstead, in the presence of the member for Mount Royal, called Bill 21 nothing short of ethnic cleansing.

Will the Minister of Justice condemn these unacceptable comments and ask his colleague from Mount Royal to set the record straight? If not, are we to conclude that this is the Liberal government's position?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has always stood up for Canadians' fundamental rights and it will continue to do so.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the rights of all citizens. We cannot choose which to protect and which to limit.

Our position is clear. The state must not dictate what people can or cannot wear based on their beliefs.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Mount Royal did not condemn the unacceptable remarks, and I get the feeling that the Minister of Justice does not condemn them either.

The member for Mount Royal was clear about the government's intentions. He said, "Legal action cannot be taken until the bill is passed". In other words, as soon as the Quebec National Assembly passes the bill, Ottawa will challenge it in court.

Quebeckers deserve to know the truth.

Will the Minister of Justice promise not to challenge the bill in court or support a court challenge?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a secular country. That is reflected in all our institutions. Government employees have the right to display their faith, and no one should have to choose between a job and the right to wear a religious symbol.

We all have a responsibility to protect fundamental rights. Any initiative that erodes those rights is irresponsible. Canada is open, inclusive and enriched by its diversity.

* * *

● (1510)

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as many members here know, today we are commemorating the 25th anniversary of the horrors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Many Canadian military who served in Rwanda, particularly in the second phase of the mission where it was not a failure but where they did really solid work, go unrecognized on the Veterans Affairs website, unrecognized on the DND website and still have not had the opportunity that some parliamentarians have had to go back to Rwanda. They need a medal for that second phase of service as other governments have done for their veterans who experienced the unbearable.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the tremendous work our men and women do in the Canadian Armed Forces is very important, regardless of the mission. The work they did in Rwanda was admirable. General Dallaire accompanied me on a trip to Africa to make sure that we had the right information so that we can do peacekeeping more appropriately.

Recognition of our men and women is part of our defence policy, and we will always look at new ways to recognize them.

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Bart Hanna, an Inuit artist commissioned to produce a sculpture to mark the 20th anniversary of Nunavut entering Confederation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The sculpture, which was officially unveiled this morning, will be on display in the West Block until it can be permanently installed in the foyer of the House of Commons after the renovations are complete.

[English]

Members can see it on the third floor in the foyer, and it will be down in the foyer of the second floor before long.

During this week in which we remember with deep sorrow and horror the 25th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire and Dr. James Orbinski. Their humanitarian work, along with others, during the genocide was nothing short of heroic.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF REFLECTION ON THE 1994 GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI IN RWANDA

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been discussion among the parties, and I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

Whereas during a three-month period beginning April 7, 1994, an estimated 800,000 to 1,000,000 Rwandans were killed in an organized campaign of genocide that targeted ethnic Tutsi, as well as ethnic Hutus and others who opposed it;

Whereas this genocide was made possible by the indifference and inaction of the international community;

That the House of Commons solemnly commemorates the 1994 genocide in Rwanda on the occasion of its 25th anniversary; reaffirms its commitment to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; and designates April 7 as the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

● (1515)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

EXTRACTIVE SECTOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COUNSELLOR

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2018 annual report to Parliament on the activities of the Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor covering the period from June 2017 to May 2018.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

While I am on my feet, I move:

That the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1555)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 1284)

YEAS

Members

Aldag
Amos
Arseneault
Badawey
Bains
Bennett
Bittle
Boissonnault
Breton
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Cormier

Alghabra
Anandasangaree
Arya
Bagnell
Baylis
Bibeau
Blair
Bossio
Carr
Chagger
Chen
Cuzner

Business of the House

Dabrusin
DeCoursey
Dhillon
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Fuhr
Gerretsen
Gould
Grewal
Hardie
Hébert
Hogg
Housefather
Hutchings
Joly
Jordan
Khalid
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lefebvre
Lighthbound
Long
Ludwig
Maloney
May (Cambridge)
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
(Soeurs)
Monsef
Morrisey
Nassif
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peterson
Philpott
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sohi
Spengemann
Tan
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Yip
Zahid— 165

Damoff
Dhaliwal
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Gameau
Goodale
Graham
Hajdu
Harvey
Hehr
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jones
Jowhari
Khera
Lametti
Lapointe
Lebouthillier
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-

Morneau
Murray
Nault
Oliphant
O'Regan
Pescholido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sarai
Schieffe
Serré
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Tabbara
Tassi
Vandenbeld
Virani
Wilkinson
Wrzesnewskyj
Young

NAYS

Members

Albas
Alleslev
Anderson
Arnold
Aubin
Barrett
Berthold

Albrecht
Allison
Angus
Ashton
Barlow
Benzen
Bezan

Blaikie
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Carrie
Clarke
Cooper
Davidson
Diotte
Dreeschen
Dusseault
Egliniski
Falk (Provencher)
Finley
Généreux
Gladu
Gourde
Hoback
Jeneroux
Julian
Kent
Kusie
Lake
Laverdière
Liepert
Lobb
MacGregor
Maguire
Masse (Windsor West)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Motz
Nicholson
Paul-Hus
Poilievre
Ramsey
Reid
Richards
Sansoucy
Schmale
Shipley
Sorenson
Stetski
Stubbs
Tilson
Trudel
Vecchio
Warkentin
Webber
Wong— 113

Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block
Brassard
Caron
Choquette
Clement
Cullen
Deltell
Doherty
Dubé
Duvall
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Gallant
Genuis
Godin
Harder
Hughes
Johns
Kelly
Kitchen
Kwan
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Leitch
Lloyd
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Martel
May (Saarich—Gulf Islands)
McColeman
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Nater
O'Toole
Pauzé
Quach
Rankin
Rempel
Saganash
Saroya
Shields
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Sweet
Trost
Van Kesteren
Wagantall
Waugh
Weir

PAIRED

Members

Ayoub
Fortin
Goldsmith-Jones
Paradis

Bratina
Gill
Moore
Ste-Marie— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, the deferred recorded division on the opposition motion standing in the name of the Member for Portage—Lisgar, currently scheduled at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment today, be further deferred until the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on Tuesday, April 9, 2019.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, during question period, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food recognized the opposition's strenuous efforts to defend the 43,000 canola farmers struggling through the worst crisis they have ever faced. That is why I am going to ask the minister to help me secure the unanimous consent of the House to hold an emergency debate tonight on this issue, which is so important to Canada's canola farmers.

The Speaker: Does the member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 31

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2019 and other measures, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 1285*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag
Amos

Alghabra
Anandasangaree

Government Orders

Arseneault
Badawey
Bains
Bennett
Bittle
Bossio
Carr
Chagger
Chen
Cuzner
Damoff
Dhaliwal
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Gameau
Goodale
Graham
Hajdu
Hébert
Hogg
Housefather
Hutchings
Joly
Jordan
Khalid
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lefebvre
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
Maloney
May (Cambridge)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)
Monsef
Morneau
Murray
Nault
Oliphant
O'Regan
Peschisolido
Petipas Taylor
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sohi
Spengemann
Tan
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wrzesnewskyj
Young

Arya
Bagnell
Baylis
Bibeau
Blair
Breton
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Cormier
Dabrusin
DeCoursey
Dhillon
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Fuhr
Gerretsen
Gould
Grewal
Hardie
Hehr
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jones
Jowhari
Khera
Lametti
Lapointe
Lebouthillier
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Saarich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Morrissey
Nassif
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peterson
Picard
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sarai
Schieffe
Serré
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Tabbara
Tassi
Vandenbeld
Virani
Wilkinson
Yip
Zahid — 162

Privilege

NAYS

Members

Albas	Albrecht
Alleslev	Allison
Anderson	Angus
Arnold	Aubin
Barlow	Barrett
Benzen	Bernier
Berthold	Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Brousseau
Caron	Carrie
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cullen
Davidson	Deltell
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeshen	Dubé
Dusseault	Duvall
Eglinski	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Finley	Gallant
Généreux	Genuis
Gladu	Godin
Gourde	Harder
Hoback	Hughes
Jeneroux	Johns
Julian	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kusie	Kwan
Lake	Lauson (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Laverdière	Leitch
Liepert	Lloyd
Lukiwski	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Maguire
Martel	McCaughey (Edmonton West)
McColeman	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Motz
Nater	Nicholson
O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Poilievre
Quach	Rankin
Rayes	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Sansoucy	Saroya
Schmale	Shields
Shiple	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Stetski	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Tilson	Trost
Trudel	Van Kesteren
Vecchio	Wagantall
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Weir
Wong— 107	

PAIRED

Members

Ayoub	Bratina
Fortin	Gill
Goldsmith-Jones	Moore
Paradis	Ste-Marie— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-97, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2019 and other measures.

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

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of

adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan, International Trade; the hon. member for Perth—Wellington, Telecommunications; the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, Canada Post.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

SUPREME COURT APPOINTMENTS PROCESS

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege related to my work as deputy justice critic for the New Democratic Party. My question arises out of that role in the process of making recommendations for appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada. I will be very brief.

I am concerned about the implications for me as a parliamentarian arising out of the inappropriate and likely illegal leak of very sensitive information in that context about a prospective appointee, namely the chief justice of the Manitoba superior court. As a consequence, I was given access, under a non-disclosure agreement, to a number of very sensitive documents and to very sensitive personal information in respect of that prospective appointee. While this deeply disturbing matter is now officially being investigated by an officer of Parliament, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, my question of privilege relates to my role as a parliamentarian.

Mr. Speaker, I know you have heard many questions of privilege in the last while, so I will not waste your time on—

The Speaker: I would remind members of the Standing Order that provides that members are not to walk between the person speaking and the Chair. I would ask members to be aware of this and to abide by it.

The hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I know that you have heard many questions of privilege over the past while, and I will not waste your time or the time of the House with lengthy quotes about what the privilege means or why it is important. In this case, my reputation as a member has been damaged as the result of speculation about the source of the unprecedented leak of this personal information about this prospective member of the Supreme Court. Until the party who did the leak is found, there remains doubt about who leaked the information in question. We have asked the Attorney General to investigate this, with no reply. Both the hon. member for Niagara Falls and I are under a cloud of suspicion. We are essentially collateral damage as a consequence.

I will cite one relevant section of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, by Bosc and Gagnon, at page 112.

It is impossible to codify all incidents which might be interpreted as matters of obstruction, interference, molestation or intimidation and, as such, constitute prima facie cases of privilege. However, some matters found to be prima facie include the damaging of a Member's reputation,

This was also dealt with by Speaker Fraser who, on May 5, 1987, at page 5766 of Debates said:

Government Orders

The privileges of a Member are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfilment of his or her duties and functions. It is obvious that the unjust damaging of a reputation could constitute such an impediment.

In conclusion, I believe the leak, wherever it originated, has shown a distinct contempt of Parliament and has had a direct impact on me and my privileges as a parliamentarian. Should you rule in my favour, Mr. Speaker, I will be prepared to move the appropriate motion to have the matter investigated at the standing procedure and House affairs committee.

• (1640)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not look forward to anything like this, but the hon. member for Victoria has made an excellent point as to what has taken place.

This is a process that was put together by the existing government in which it wanted a number of members of Parliament to participate in this process to make recommendations with respect to the Supreme Court justice. I remember that the government wanted to be careful about this. My office was told that we were going to have to swear that we were going to keep it secret. My staff pointed out that I had top security clearance as a former foreign minister, in other positions and as a member of the Privy Council. However, when I heard this, I said that it was fine and I would swear to keep quiet anything we did and any contents of the meeting.

The meeting was very small, involving several members of Parliament. The member for Victoria, the then justice minister, who we made recommendations to, and I were the only people who knew this. It was something that was given to the Prime Minister's Office. Therefore, what we hear, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice said on Friday, and the Prime Minister and others, is that, no, neither the Prime Minister nor anyone in his office leaked this. Okay. Then the justice minister said that no, nothing came from his department. Then who was it? Let us face it. There were just a couple of us involved with this.

This is why I have found it very concerning. It seems to me that it weakens people's trust in this institution. We ask people to swear that they will keep something quiet, secret, and not divulge this information, and then when we see something like this, we want to see something done.

A number of us asked the justice minister last week, in I think four questions in a row, to please investigate this. Would you not want to investigate this, Mr. Speaker? If you believed that the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office or the Department of Justice had anything to do with this leak, would you not want this investigated? I think most people looking at this would say yes, it only makes sense to do that, and it is the right thing to do.

I am asking, Mr. Speaker, that you have a look at this, because this certainly impacts all of us who want to participate and be part of this process here. That, I believe, has been compromised by this. It should be changed, and it should be put to rest by a proper investigation.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Victoria for raising the matter. I thank the hon. member for Niagara Falls for his comments. I will examine the matter and come back to the House in due course.

[*Translation*]

MULTILATERAL INSTRUMENT IN RESPECT OF TAX CONVENTIONS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-82, An Act to implement a multilateral convention to implement tax treaty related measures to prevent base erosion and profit shifting, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question of the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-82, An Act to implement a multilateral convention to implement tax treaty related measures to prevent base erosion and profit shifting, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1720)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 1286*)

YEAS

Members

Albas	Albrecht
Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Anderson
Arnold	Arseneault
Arya	Aubin
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Barlow
Barrett	Baylis
Bennett	Benzen
Bernier	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Boissonnault	Bossio
Boutin-Sweet	Brassard
Breton	Brosseau
Cannings	Caron
Carr	Carrie
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Champagne	Chen
Chong	Choquette
Clarke	Clement

Government Orders

Cooper	Cormier
Cullen	Cuzner
Dabrusin	Damoff
Davidson	DeCoursey
Deltell	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diotte
Doherty	Dreeshen
Drouin	Dubé
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseault	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Easter
Eglinski	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking
Eyolfson	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Fergus	Fillmore
Finley	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Freeland
Fry	Fuhr
Gallant	Garneau
Généreux	Genuis
Gerretsen	Gladu
Godin	Goodale
Gould	Gourde
Graham	Grewal
Hajdu	Harder
Hardie	Harvey
Hébert	Hehr
Hoback	Hogg
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Jeneroux	Johns
Joly	Jordan
Jowhari	Julian
Kelly	Kent
Khalid	Khera
Kitchen	Kusie
Kwan	Lake
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Laverdière	Lebouthillier
Lefebvre	Leitch
Levitt	Liepert
Lighbound	Lockhart
Long	Longfield
Ludwig	Lukiwski
MacGregor	MacKenzie
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maguire
Maloney	Martel
Masse (Windsor West)	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCaughey (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)	
Monsef	
Morrissey	Motz
Murray	Nassif
Nater	Nault
Nicholson	O'Connell
Oliphant	Oliver
O'Regan	Ouellette
Paul-Hus	Paupé
Peschisolido	Peterson
Petitpas Taylor	Philpott
Picard	Poilievre
Quach	Qualtrough
Ramsey	Rankin
Ratansi	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Rota
Rudd	Ruimy

Rusnak	Sahota
Saini	Sajjan
Samson	Sangha
Sansoucy	Sarai
Saroya	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schmale
Schulte	Serré
Sgro	Sheehan
Shields	Shipley
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sohi	Sopuck
Sorbara	Sorenson
Spengemann	Stanton
Stetski	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Tilson
Trost	Trudel
Van Kesteren	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Vecchio	Virani
Wagantall	Warkentin
Waugh	Webber
Weir	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wong	Wrzesnewskyj
Yip	Young
Zahid	Zimmer — 270

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Ayoub	Bratina
Fortin	Gill
Goldsmith-Jones	Moore
Paradis	Ste-Marie- — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today about the importance of tax fairness and to join the debate on Bill C-82. I would like to use my time to explain how the bill would become an important new tool in the government's arsenal to combat aggressive international tax avoidance.

Tax fairness is fundamental to our democracy. It is a cornerstone of our government's plan to grow the middle class and spur economic growth so that more people can join it. In each of our government's last three budgets, we introduced measures to enhance the integrity of Canada's tax system. We continue to do work and take action in this regard so that Canadians can have confidence that their tax system is working and is fair.

Government Orders

As part of these actions to improve tax fairness, we introduced Bill C-82. The bill is a response to a profound challenge. When some Canadians choose not to pay their fair share of taxes, all of us are affected. What does this mean for Canadians? It means less money for important social programs to help new parents take care of growing families, workers find skills training or seniors live in independence. It means less money for vital infrastructure such as the roads, railways, ports and airports that help people and goods move safely and on time to where they need to go. As well, it means less money for policing our communities, health care and the environment. I could go on and on.

This is why it is important to make sure our tax system is and remains fair—

• (1725)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that there is a debate going on. If they wish to take their conversations outside, it would be much appreciated.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, our government believes that all Canadians deserve to reap the benefits of a strong and vibrant economy. It goes without saying that this is made possible through a fair tax system.

[*Translation*]

Now I would like to talk about the bill before us in detail. Bill C-82 will give Canada better tools to fight what is known as tax base erosion and profit shifting, which is also known domestically and internationally as BEPS. The issue is tax avoidance strategies that wealthy companies and individuals use to exploit loopholes in the tax system. They take advantage of these loopholes to avoid paying tax or to shift their profits to low- or no-tax jurisdictions.

These schemes enable wealthy companies and individuals to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. They rob Canadians of the tax revenue that pays for the services and benefits that make Canada a good place to live and a more just and equitable society.

We have worked hard to combat that loss of tax revenue. In particular, I would highlight the work we have done on this with our international partners. We have worked with our partners at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, and other G20 nations to identify ways in which our current tax treaties are vulnerable to potential abuse.

Those organizations then developed measures that the countries can choose to include in their tax treaties to directly address those vulnerabilities. This new approach also addressed the fact that it would take a long time to renegotiate existing tax treaties one by one.

The approach I just described has been included in this bill. This is called a multilateral convention, also known as a multilateral instrument or MLI. This instrument is the result of a global initiative and the work of more than 100 countries and jurisdictions, including Canada. The multilateral instrument allows participating jurisdictions to adopt measures with respect to BEPS agreed to by the OECD and G20 without having to renegotiate each tax treaty.

By supporting Bill C-82 and implementing the multilateral instrument, the Government of Canada is taking action to preserve the integrity of our tax system and stop people from abusing our tax treaties. In addition, implementing the MLI will demonstrate Canada's desire to take concerted action with our treaty partners to combat aggressive international tax avoidance.

The fact is, at a time when companies and capital are increasingly globalized and interconnected, no country can fight tax avoidance single-handedly. In order to implement effective reforms, it is more vital than ever to collaborate with our international partners, such as the OECD and the G20. With this bill, we are taking one more step in that direction.

[*English*]

On the home front, the government is also aggressively pursuing those who promote tax avoidance schemes. In the last fiscal year alone, we imposed roughly \$48 million in civil penalties on these third parties.

We are also gaining better access to information on Canadians' overseas bank accounts with the implementation of the common reporting standard, or CRS. CRS is a new system that will let Canada and more than 100 other countries exchange financial account information. This information will help us identify instances in which wealthy Canadians hide money in offshore accounts to avoid paying their taxes.

We have also hired more specialist auditors who focus on the high net-worth individual taxpayers. These teams include about 250 auditors, who are responsible for examining high-income earners and more than 800 high net-worth individuals and their webs of corporate structures.

In addition, the Minister of Finance and his provincial and territorial counterparts have committed to ensuring that Canadian authorities know who owns which corporations in Canada. They are also committed to better harmonizing corporate ownership record requirements between various jurisdictions.

• (1730)

Building on that agreement, we amended the Canada Business Corporations Act to require federally incorporated corporations to maintain beneficial ownership information. The government's previous budget, in 2018, enhanced the income tax reporting requirements for trusts so that beneficial ownership information would be more available and accessible.

Data of this kind helps Canadian authorities act against those engaging in international tax avoidance and criminal activities, such as tax evasion.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Thanks to the latest available data and our government's targeted investments, the Canada Revenue Agency is now armed with better tools and approaches that enhance the integrity and fairness of our tax system.

These tools help the CRA collect valuable information and allow its agents to work smarter and more effectively to ensure all Canadians pay their fair share.

For example, Canada is a member of the Joint International Taskforce on Shared Intelligence and Collaboration, or JITSIC. This expanded network of 38 countries works closely and actively with other tax administrations to coordinate tax compliance activities across the spectrum of international tax risks. This expertise has allowed the CRA to participate in and lead JITSIC expert working groups, including in the development of a strategy to identify and stop promoters of abusive tax schemes.

[English]

Canada has also taken steps to coordinate its criminal investigation by joining Australia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States in the Joint Chiefs of Global Tax Enforcement, or J5, group. The J5 will share intelligence and criminal investigation strategies with each other and conduct joint operations in the fight against those who commit, promote and enable international tax crimes, money laundering and cybercrimes.

The CRA has also been automatically accessing all international electronic fund transfers for more than \$10,000 entering or leaving the country. As of March 31, 2018, teams have analyzed more than 187,000 of these transactions, amounting to more than \$177 billion. Reviewing these types of transfers helps identify transactions for which taxes should potentially have been paid and better risk assess individuals and businesses.

Through these efforts, Canada is taking concrete measures to secure tax fairness for Canadians. That includes continuing to work to maintain and improve our enforcement of tax compliance, so we can have a society that works for all Canadians.

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to point out that we are carrying out our work to ensure tax fairness in a context where the Canadian economy is well-positioned to continue to grow. The government remains committed to investing in people and what they care about the most, namely, good jobs, strong communities, a cleaner environment and better opportunities for future generations.

Almost four years ago, one of the first things we did was to ask the wealthiest 1% to pay a little more, which enabled us to lower taxes for the middle class.

Our government then implemented the new Canada child benefit, which, compared to the previous child benefit, is simpler, more generous, completely tax free and better targeted to help those who need it most.

In order to ensure that the Canada child benefit takes into account the ever-rising cost of living and helps those who really need it, the government indexed the benefit as of July 2018, two years earlier

than planned. A typical middle-class family of four is now receiving approximately \$2,000 more a year than in 2015 thanks to the tax cut I mentioned and the Canada child benefit. The OECD pointed that out this summer in a very interesting report that I encourage all members of the House and all Canadians to read.

When we add up the impact of measures such as the Canada child benefit, our government's new and more generous Canada workers benefit, and our support for seniors through the guaranteed income supplement, which was enhanced in our first budget, we are on the right track to help lift approximately 650,000 Canadians out of poverty. Actually, we are more than just on the right track since we have already lifted 825,000 Canadians out of poverty; according to Statistics Canada, that represents a 20% drop in poverty in Canada.

● (1735)

That is thanks in part to an approach very different from that of the previous government. We asked the wealthiest 1% to do its part so we could lower taxes for the middle class and those who need it most. We created the Canada child benefit, which lifted many families out of poverty and actually reduced child poverty by 40% in this country. I think that is something we should be proud of. Making sure our tax system is fair and equitable made that possible. That is a priority for us, but unfortunately, it was not a priority for many past governments, including the one that was in power prior to the October 2015 election.

We have been making great strides toward creating stronger, more resilient communities, and our major infrastructure investments are one reason why. Since 2016, we have approved over 30,000 infrastructure projects through the investing in Canada plan. The vast majority of those projects are under way and are creating good jobs for the middle class. They are also improving the lives of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, which is, after all, the ultimate goal.

[English]

These significant and concrete achievements have bettered the lives of many Canadians across the country.

Our plan is working. Over 850,000 more Canadians are employed today than in 2015. The unemployment rate is near its lowest level in 40 years. Our economy is one of the fastest growing in the G7.

We are committed to building an economy that works for everyone, where every person has a real and fair shot at success. Moreover, we are committed to making these investments to our economy for the long term, while we continue to bring down the federal debt to GDP ratio.

To continue on the trajectory of growth, Canada's economic health needs everyone to pay their fair share of taxes. The legislation before us, Bill C-82, gets Canada closer to meeting that goal.

I encourage all members of the House to support the legislation before us.

Government Orders

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary skips over the fact that this was originally started with the OECD under the previous government. That being said, it is helpful to know that a government can recognize when it is in its interests to pursue what a previous government had done and building on that. Therefore, I am happy to see that happen.

The member mentioned a number of examples to fight tax evasion and money laundering internationally. While it is important to have these rules put in place, I would point out that on this very day, the solicitor general of British Columbia, David Eby, has called out the federal government for not supporting the RCMP so it can do the work that is required to tackle money laundering.

A tremendous amount of documentation in the German report has come out, yet the Liberal government does not fund the important part of enforcement.

Does the member realize that having rules is important, but there also needs to be a commitment to having boots on the ground to make a meaningful difference and to ensure we have a system that works for everyone?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate to acknowledge the efforts of the former government, which joined the concerted international efforts as part of the BEPS project. It is true that this began under the former government, and yet we could have passed this bill much more quickly with the support of the opposition, as we have been working on it for quite some time. However, the opposition sometimes plays political games that affect and delay the process. Nevertheless I do want to point out that this was an initiative of the previous government.

With respect to my colleague's question about funding for the RCMP and the means at its disposal to combat tax avoidance and evasion in Canada, I find it somewhat surreal to hear this from a Conservative member because the Conservatives made cuts in this area. The former minister of national revenue under Stephen Harper, Mr. Blackburn, clearly said in an interview that the fight against tax evasion and avoidance was not a priority for them.

It is better late than never, but it is rather odd to have a Conservative member come to this realization and state that it is important to fight tax evasion and avoidance. He should also acknowledge that we have provided the Canada Revenue Agency with almost \$1 billion in additional funding in the past three budgets to support these efforts to fight tax evasion and ensure that everyone pays their fair share. He voted against these measures.

I therefore tip my hat to the Conservative member, who has finally realized what we in the Liberal government have known for a long time.

• (1740)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a huge gap between what Canadians would expect and what the government is actually doing. A few days ago the minister for the Canada Revenue Agency continued to say that it had hired hundreds of new auditors to deal with the massive

tax evasion that the government had, in a very real sense, encouraged.

We found out that instead of hundreds being hired, there was just a scant few dozen because of all the retirements that had taken place in the agency. We are also well aware that the government has absolutely and steadfastly opposed having in place a publicly accessible beneficial ownership registry that would be a key tool in fighting money laundering.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary these two questions. First, why did the Liberals mislead the House and the Canadian public about the number of auditors they had hired at the Canada Revenue Agency? Second, why are they absolutely opposed to a publicly accessible beneficial ownership registry?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his work as finance critic, and I want to thank the NDP members who have examined the issue of money laundering.

The Liberal government has taken a leadership role on beneficial ownership. As I said in my speech, the Minister of Finance met with his provincial counterparts and came to an agreement with them to move forward with harmonization and to get a better idea of who owns Canadian companies. He realizes that the vast majority of businesses fall under provincial jurisdiction, so he must work with the provinces.

Under the leadership of the federal government and the Minister of Finance, we are working with the provinces to give authorities greater access to the beneficial ownership of Canadian companies, to see where the owners of different companies are located.

In addition, we allocated significant resources to the Canada Revenue Agency in the 2016 and 2017 budgets to help the agency combat tax evasion or avoidance. This has been a priority for our government since we came to power.

This obviously will not happen overnight; these investigations take time. It will also take a significant amount of job training. This was obviously not a priority for the former government, but has been for us since budget 2016. I think this is clear to the Canadians watching.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are proud to support this bill, but there is a lot of hypocrisy in what we hear from the government on this. I will go into some of that in my speech, but I will give the member an opportunity to respond to this point.

The member talks about whether we are concerned with the situation of wealthy corporate executives versus the considerations of everyday people. However, on the carbon tax, the government has given a break to Canada's largest emitters. It says that they need the break. However, it will not provide any kind of break, with respect to the impact of the carbon tax, to everyday Canadians who now pay so much more at the pumps and elsewhere as a result of the government's punitive approach.

Government Orders

If this were an environmental measure, if the Liberals were serious about the environment and if they thought this actually would help the environment, they would apply it consistently across the board. They are not doing that.

In spite of the man-of-the-people rhetoric from the parliamentary secretary, why are the Liberals giving a holiday on the carbon tax to Canada's largest emitters, while ensuring the maximum impact on everyday Canadians?

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, it is the opposite. We have to wonder where the hon. member has been for the past few months and weeks. The Conservatives are starting to believe their own nonsense. The average Canadian receives a climate incentive that exceeds the anticipated cost. Through this policy, we made sure that we are truly supporting middle-class Canadians and I believe nine out of 10 families will have more money because of his policy.

I invite the hon. member to take another look at his numbers. When it comes to the importance of dealing with climate change, it is interesting to see that over the past 20 years the Conservatives have, at times, had the wisdom to want to put a price on pollution. While the entire planet is now realizing the importance of dealing with climate change, the Conservatives are retreating and burying their heads even further in the sand.

They refuse to see the importance of acting to protect the planet and to fight climate change. It is disappointing and the debt they are leaving future generations on this issue is despicable. I encourage them to do some serious soul-searching when it comes to their plan for the climate.

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask the hon. member and parliamentary secretary about the theme of our government for the last three and a half years, which has focused on tax fairness. We have Bill C-82 with respect to base erosion and profit shifting, along with budget 2019, which limits the stock option tax deduction. We did a full tax expenditure review beginning in 2016, with \$4 billion in savings. Those funds are being invested for everyday programs.

Could the parliamentary secretary comment on how important tax fairness is for our government?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I think our government has been clear from the very beginning about this. We asked the wealthiest 1% to pay a little more so that we could give a tax break to the middle class. It was the first thing we did, but the Conservatives voted against it. It comes as no surprise that they would vote against it, because there has been a stark difference between their approach and ours.

For instance, when the Conservatives fought to keep sending the Canada child benefit to families of millionaires, we took a different approach, one that is based on the needs of Canadian families. It is more generous and free of taxes, and it is helping to lift hundreds of thousands of kids out of poverty.

That approach differentiates us as well with respect to the TFSA. One of the Conservative policies during their former mandate was to double the TFSA limit to \$11,000. I wonder how many Canadians at the end of the year have \$11,000 after taxes to put in their TFSA. The American who invented the TFSA said that in the long term this would put the Canadian government in a fiscal straitjacket. When the former Conservative finance minister was asked what he was going to do about it, he said that it was a problem for Stephen Harper's granddaughter to solve.

That is the Conservatives' approach: to give more to the wealthiest while letting inequalities flourish and grow. That is what they did during their decade in government.

We have taken a different approach, and it is working. Statistics Canada, in the last two weeks, said that poverty has been reduced by 20% over the last three years in Canada. That is huge. I think it is something that Canadians should be proud of.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in the House today. I understand my friend from Carleton was trying to give me a run for my money in terms of being the most verbose Conservative, so today I am going to try to catch up to him, with a 20-minute speech on this important bill.

Before I get to the substance of the bill, I feel the need to respond to some of the things that the parliamentary secretary for finance said, because he is trying to set up this narrative that is based on made-up things. I want to point to some clear facts that my friends across the way will hopefully take on board and recognize.

What were the fiscal policies of the Conservative government with respect to tax reduction? It is important to underline that all of the taxes that were lowered by the Conservatives are the ones that were disproportionately paid by lower-income Canadians. We raised the base personal exemption; that is, we increased the amount of money that people can earn before they have to pay any tax. Surely, my friend across the way would not say that raising the base personal exemption was somehow targeted at helping the wealthy. Indeed, we took many low-income Canadians off the tax rolls completely.

We lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. It is the tax that all Canadians pay. In particular, it is a regressive tax that is paid disproportionately, because a higher proportion of GST is paid by lower-income Canadians than is paid as a proportion of other taxes. Therefore, lowering the GST was particularly beneficial to middle and low-income Canadians. We also lowered the lowest marginal income tax rate.

Government Orders

We lowered business tax rates, in particular small business tax rates. Why did we lower business tax rates? When we lower business tax rates, the evidence shows that it creates jobs. It also raised business tax revenue over the time that we have seen a reduction in business taxes in this country. It was a process that began under the previous Liberal government, which, relatively speaking, I think was better than the current Liberal government on many fiscal issues. It began the process of lowering business taxes, which was continued under the Harper Conservative government. The effect of that was that over the same period, we saw an increase in business tax revenue. The tax reductions we were making were targeted at improving the effectiveness of our economy and providing tax relief to those Canadians who needed tax relief the most. Did we lower the highest marginal tax rate? No, we did not. We targeted tax relief to Canadians who needed it most by raising the base personal exemption, by lowering the GST and by lowering the lowest marginal tax rate.

The parliamentary secretary for finance can say that the Conservatives think a certain way or that we want certain things, but I challenge him to speak specifically, which the current government never does. We believe that helping low and middle-income Canadians can be done most effectively by letting them keep more of their own money and deciding how they want to spend it themselves. We do not take a paternalistic approach when it comes to helping Canadians who are struggling financially. We think people can make good monetary decisions about what is in their interest and how they want to pursue projects and needs that are important to them and their family. That is why our approach emphasizes tax reductions.

The current government has raised taxes for middle-class Canadians and those, as it likes to say, who are working hard to join it.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Members were clapping when I pointed out that the government is raising taxes on Canadians working hard to join the middle class, so they finally realize it. We certainly invite those members who realize this flaw to come over and join us. There is still some time. I know there are so many people coming over to the opposition benches these days, some voluntarily and some not, and we welcome more to see the light.

If we look at the contrast in approach, we have the carbon tax, which is a new tax imposed by the current government. That is specifically targeted at punishing Canadians who can least pay the tax. The government has said it is an environmental measure and that the Conservatives want to make pollution free again.

● (1750)

The Liberals are giving a holiday on the carbon tax to Canada's largest emitters. There is no paying of the carbon tax and there is no cost to those large emitters. Instead, they are imposing the cost on Canadians who can least afford it, on the single mom who needs to drive her car to take the kids to grandma's and grandpa's, on the small business owner just starting out and on individual Canadians who are struggling and do not have high-priced lobbyists or the ability to access the PMO.

We know how many meetings happened in the PMO on how to help SNC-Lavalin avoid prosecution. I wish they had at least that many meetings to think about Canadians who are struggling and will struggle more because of the carbon tax that is being imposed on Canadians who can least afford it while large emitters are getting a break.

If the Liberals were at all serious in their claim that this is an environmental measure, then they would impose a carbon tax across the board. However, it is not an environmental measure, it is a revenue measure and that is why Conservatives will get rid of the carbon tax. We will not just get rid of the carbon tax on large emitters, but we will make sure that no Canadian is paying the federally imposed carbon tax that the Prime Minister is so desperate to impose on them.

My friend from Winnipeg North wants to know what is going to happen in the provinces. We see in provincial elections across the country that more and more Canadians are rejecting the carbon tax as well. We have seen that rejection in Ontario, New Brunswick, his province of Manitoba and very soon we will see that in Alberta as well. I am looking forward, next week, to Albertans joining the growing movement of Canadians who are rejecting the carbon tax. People in my constituency may still face a federally imposed carbon tax even after the next provincial election. However, they will not have long to wait until we replace the current government this fall and ensure that Albertans and all Canadians do not have the burden of the carbon tax.

For the members who want to say this is the only possible way to respond to climate change, I point out to them that we saw a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions under the previous Conservative government. We saw in every jurisdiction across the country that emissions either went down or up by less than they had during the previous period. We saw an increase in emissions in British Columbia under the carbon tax that they have had in place for quite a while. All the evidence suggests that this is not an environmental measure and, again, the Liberals' own decision to give a holiday on the carbon tax to the largest emitters shows that they are just not serious about this.

The government needs to re-examine the rhetoric it is using in light of the reality and in light of the fact that it is imposing tax increases at every opportunity it can. It is clear why it is imposing these tax increases. It simply cannot get a handle on spending.

In the last election the Prime Minister looked Canadians in the eyes and told them that he would run deficits lower than \$10 billion, and then he would balance the budget by the 2018-19 fiscal year. There was no balance. We saw very clearly in the budget that the government has not balanced the budget. It has no intention of balancing the budget and it will not face up to the fact that it made a promise that it simply did not have any plan or sincerity about keeping.

Government Orders

Now the Liberals are desperate to start to plug that fiscal hole by imposing new taxes on Canadians at every opportunity, and they have tried to do this in so many ways. After the last election, despite promising to lower the small business tax rate to 9%, they undid that promise and said they were going to leave the tax rate at 10.5%, effectively a tax increase on small business. Then, with great fanfare, after they had attacked small businesses, after they had called small business owners tax cheats, after they tried to impose these new rules that were met with such frustration, such virulent objection from the business community, guess what they said. They said they were going to lower the small business tax rate to 9%, which is what they had promised they were going to do in the last election before they unmade that promise. However, they still have changed rules for small businesses that impose a new and greater tax burden on them.

• (1755)

We know what the current government is about. It is about raising taxes at every turn to try to plug its wide-open hole in terms of its fiscal plan and we cannot let it do that. As these deficits and these debts grow, it will certainly be raising taxes unless we get a new government in place that ensures Canadians are no longer paying for the mistakes of the current Prime Minister and that instead allows Canadians to get ahead by lowering their taxes.

We can be sure that, as we have seen in the past, the approach of a Conservative government, under the able leadership of the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, would be focused on providing tax relief to those Canadians who need it most, those Canadians who are suffering the most under the current government's high-tax, high-spend agenda.

There are members across the way who are shouting the phrase “trickle down”. The approach of the current government is to pour subsidies on the largest corporations, to try to give special deals to its friends, to try to help SNC-Lavalin to get out of its prosecution and to somehow think that will trickle down. On this side of the House, we oppose the Liberals' theory of trickle-down government, and that is why we believe in providing tax relief to Canadians who need it most as we did by lowering the GST, by lowering the lowest marginal tax rate and by raising the basic personal exemption.

It was important for me to start out by responding to my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, but let me now make a few comments on this legislation, which, contrary to my tone until now, is actually legislation that we support. It is legislation that really builds on great work done by the previous government. We would not necessarily know it by hearing some of the comments across the way, but Conservatives in government were actively engaged with our international partners in ensuring that we have a fair and more transparent tax system. The work that we are dealing with in terms of the bill began as a result of an agreement in 2013 and Conservatives from that period onward, and indeed before that period, were active in engaging with our international partners.

In January 2015, we put in place a requirement that electronic transfers of \$10,000 or more had to be reported to the Canada Revenue Agency by banks and financial institutions. We have always, in terms of our policy declarations and the principles we have put out there in platforms since, emphasized tax fairness and emphasized simplification of the tax code. This is vitally needed. An

area that many Canadians bring to our attention on a regular basis is that there are opportunities for us to ensure proper reporting and ensure tax fairness and, therefore, strengthen Canada's revenue position.

Therefore, this is legislation that builds on that work that our colleagues have spoken in favour of up until now and certainly that we continue to support.

Even as we discuss this legislation, we continue to see the gaps in terms of some of the things the government members say and the reality in terms of what they do. In many cases with these international conventions, we talk about the issues of simplification, of consistency, of ensuring that CRA is treating everybody fairly and of making sure that there is not double taxation.

In that way, it is worth pointing out again the good work of my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge who put forward Motion No. 43, which was a motion that would impose a duty of care on the Canada Revenue Agency in its interactions with Canadians, basically to ensure that people are treated fairly in their interactions with the Canada Revenue Agency. While, on the one hand, we have situations where companies may be taking advantage of some of these creative tax-planning arrangements, we have situations where individuals who may be low-income individuals face the CRA coming down very hard on them and they have a difficult time responding. It was a common-sense, reasonable motion that my colleague from Calgary put forward and I was pleased to support that. Unfortunately, it was only members of the Conservative caucus who supported Motion No. 43.

• (1800)

All members of the government opposed this common sense tax fairness measure. Unfortunately, my colleagues in the NDP opposed it. We do hear the NDP members sometimes talk about the problem their constituents face with respect to interactions with CRA.

However, I hope we will have an opportunity to bring a similar initiative in the future, perhaps in a future Parliament. Maybe in light of the more recent comments we have heard on this from the NDP, maybe its members will support it at that time. Canadians can have confidence that when it comes to holding CRA accountable to ensure that people are treated fairly and equally under the law, thus far it has only been the Conservatives who have taken that clear, consistent principled position.

If the Liberals are concerned about fairness for the middle class, then we would expect them to vote in favour of initiatives that would ensure fairness for the middle class when they have an opportunity. Unfortunately, they have not done that.

On the issue of double taxation, I spoke earlier about the carbon tax. We have with the carbon tax a form of double taxation, which is the fact that the federal government is requiring a carbon tax in every jurisdiction. It is imposing a federal carbon tax in jurisdictions where provinces are not imposing it themselves. Then it is collecting GST on top of it.

Government Orders

The Liberals have said that this will be revenue neutral for the federal government. It is not revenue neutral for the federal government. In and of itself, the federal carbon tax imposed on provinces that have rejected it is not revenue neutral from the perspective of the federal government. They have said in their announcements that most of the money will be rebated back. That is a big difference from all of the money, but the government is collecting GST on top of that.

Therefore, right here within our own domestic reality, we have a problem of double taxation. We have taxes being imposed on top of other taxes. This increases the burden on Canadians who really can least afford it.

We have had a number of initiatives, and not just speaking of the work of the previous government, in this Parliament from different members of our Conservative team who have been trying to bring about tax relief for Canadians. Every time we propose measures to bring tax relief to Canadians, the Liberals oppose them.

The leader of the opposition had an excellent initiative around making parental leave tax free. This would give parents a greater ability to plan to preserve their own fiscal situation while they were going through the transition of having a child. Certainly, we want to support parents in that situation. The government's approach to parental leave is to try to reduce that flexibility by reducing the flexibility that families have to allocate leave between different partners. Our approach is to provide more choice, more opportunity by reducing taxes across the board. Unfortunately, the Liberals voted against it.

Finally, with respect to Bill C-82, a mixed signal is being sent by the government. On the one hand, it wants to look like it is being tough on tax evasion and tax avoidance. On the other hand, we have seen how dedicated the Prime Minister and his team were to try and get a special deal for SNC-Lavalin. We do not exactly send a message that we are tough on anything when it comes to the actions of big corporations, if then we also try to put as much pressure as we can to get a special deal for those well-connected companies that can afford high-priced lobbyists and can push back there. It is gravely inconsistent.

If the government wants to address this issue and the issues around it, it needs to send a message that everybody is equal under the law, that it does not matter if one is a big company or a Canadian who is struggling to get by, that the law is the law. Sending that message in a clear and consistent way, ensuring that everybody is treated equally and fairly under the law, would very much address what we are talking about. It would confront the problems that this legislation seeks to confront.

Therefore, while we support the bill before us, we recognize the desperate need for the government to do better, to stop piling taxes on those Canadians who can least afford to pay them and to start sending a message that everybody, regardless of where one is situated in society, is equal under the law.

•(1805)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a similar speech from the member many times before, and I find it very troubling particularly when he talks about getting a handle on spending.

How does he justify that Stephen Harper ran up the debt up by \$160 billion? I know his response, because we hear it a lot from those on the other side of the House. They say it was the economic times and the circumstances, and that they needed to come back out of the 2008 recession.

However, in reality, if we were to go back over the last 151 years, we would see that Conservatives have been in power for 36% of the time but have racked up well over 55% of the debt. In fact, of the last 19 budgets introduced by Conservatives in the House, 16 of them ran deficits, occurring under Mulroney and Harper. The only three that ran surpluses were the two that came after Paul Martin's \$13-billion surplus and the one in 2015, after Conservatives slashed veterans services and sold off shares of GM at bargain prices so that they could produce a budget to bring into the election.

How can the member opposite square off that argument about Stephen Harper's record?

•(1810)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the member is asking a similar question to one he has asked before, so he will no doubt receive a similar answer. Let me answer each point he made.

He said that Conservatives ran up \$160 billion. Usually we hear the Liberals say it was \$150 billion. Maybe by the election they will be saying it was \$300 billion. The figure of \$150 billion is not even accurate. In fact, in spite of the global financial crisis, the federal debt-to-GDP ratio went down during the period of the last Conservative government.

During this time, members across the way, some of whom were not here at that time, were calling for an increase in spending. Liberals thought we should be spending more, but we said, no, we would have timely, targeted and temporary deficits and we would get back to balance, which we did.

The member opposite wants to compare Canada's history over the last 150 years. I do not know if I can say much about the record of former prime minister Charles Tupper, for example, when it comes to deficit spending.

We could go back a long way. I do not hold the member opposite responsible for the Liberal policy under Pierre Trudeau of opening residential schools. I do not hold the Liberal Party responsible for all of the things it has done over the last 150 years, and I cannot necessarily be held responsible for Conservative policies that were pursued in the early part of the 20th century and last part of the 19th century.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring the debate back to the issue before us today, tax treaties.

Government Orders

Does my colleague have an opinion on concluding tax treaties with administrations where the tax rate is extremely low compared to the tax rate in Canada? These tax treaties can become loopholes for certain multinationals that manage to transfer their international profits to these places. Instead of declaring their income in Canada, they declare it in these places that have agreements with Canada. I would like my colleague's opinion on these agreements, to come back to the matter at hand today.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the reason we enter into tax treaties, whether with higher tax jurisdictions or lower tax jurisdictions, is to ensure a framework for tax fairness so that people are not facing double taxation and to ensure there is a proper reporting structure to address possible issues of tax avoidance.

To the member's point, there is a principle here such that, regardless of the agreement, taxes should be paid in the jurisdiction where, in some sense, the work is being done. If there is a case, for instance, where all of the operational aspects are in one place but none of the taxes are being paid there, that is obviously an issue to discuss and to explore how we can respond to it.

I will also point out for the member that when other jurisdictions have lower taxes, companies can relocate to those jurisdictions if they wish to. It is not possible to, say, prohibit a company from moving its headquarters somewhere else. In fact, under the previous government, companies from the United States chose to move their headquarters to Canada. However, they would have had to bring aspects of their operations to Canada associated with that as well. When we are a low-tax jurisdiction, that can work to our advantage as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns Canadians have is that as we get closer to an election, they expect a certain element of truth from leaders. We saw a good example of that today from the Leader of the Opposition, who continued to deny that he did not retweet after making some changes and so forth.

Let me give an example of what the member across the way said in terms of trying to give misinformation.

He is trying to give the impression that most of the residents in Winnipeg North are going to have to pay additional taxes as a direct result of the price on pollution, knowing full well that there is a tax rebate. People will find they are actually getting money from Ottawa. Most of the residents in Winnipeg North will benefit by the price on pollution, yet the Conservative Party will try to give a false impression to Canadians.

Is it the Conservative Party's overall plan to try to gain votes by trying to deceive Canadians?

• (1815)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, what unbelievable language and what an unbelievable approach from the member for Winnipeg North.

I look forward to talking to his constituents about the carbon tax, because I am sure that people in Winnipeg North, as in Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and elsewhere, are deeply skeptical of the

government's claim that it will take more money from people, process it over here, and then give even more of it back. When has that worked out?

That is about the quality of math that we would expect from a Prime Minister who said he would balance the budget by this year, and yet we are still tens of billions of dollars in deficit.

Canadians know they are paying more as a result of the Liberal carbon tax, and they simply do not accept that they would be any further ahead with this process of taking their money and processing it and rebating some of it back.

I look forward to having the conversation in the next election about the government's plan on the carbon tax. We have shown that we can do more for the environment by not imposing new taxes on Canadians. The Liberals believe that the only solution, the only thing worth doing, is to impose new taxes under all kinds of different names and excuses. We reject that and we look forward to having that debate.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague a very important question. He mentioned how companies can relocate. As everyone knows, General Motors is leaving Oshawa. We have seen 1,500 job losses in Windsor, and manufacturing is very susceptible to bad tax policy and uncertainty. I want the member to address how important the tax policy is for certainty and competitiveness.

We heard our colleagues talk about the carbon tax. When I was knocking on doors this weekend, a constituent told me I had to go back and tell the Liberals to make the carbon tax even higher because he wanted it to be \$1 million per tonne. That way, with Liberal math, he would be getting back \$200,000 or \$300,000. He said that then he could retire.

I do not know if Canadians realize how bad a policy this is. Could my colleague please talk about how important it is to have good tax policy to provide business certainty and to make sure we have competitiveness?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, it is a great question from my colleague, who obviously lives these issues and is hearing directly from his constituents about them.

I come from an energy-producing part of the country. He comes from a part of the country where manufacturing jobs in the auto sector in particular are very important. We see in both of these areas how the imposition of taxes and regulatory changes, in particular the imposition of new taxes, is hurting economic development.

We saw in the past how lowering business taxes led to an increase in business tax revenue. That was because companies were looking at those tax policies and making decisions about investment that reflected those calculations. They were choosing to invest in Canada as a result of the fact that Canada was a good place to invest.

We have many advantages. We have an educated workforce and many things going for us as a country, but the financial dimension of it is obviously critical as well for companies that are thinking about making these investments.

Government Orders

The government's solution to this is to tax more and put the money forward in corporate welfare for things like superclusters. We have seen it has much less effect for the government to pick winners and losers and give money to some of its friends while taxing other people more. It is a much less effective approach than simply lowering taxes for all Canadians, especially targeting tax relief for small business and to those Canadians who need that tax relief at the individual level the most, thus putting them in the driver's seat and allowing them to make decisions to take advantage of the opportunities that result. It is up to the government to give people as much opportunity as possible to get ahead and then to let them do that with their own resources.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before giving the floor to the hon. member for Sherbrooke, I must inform him that there are 11 minutes remaining before the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have these 11 minutes to speak to Bill C-82 and share my opinion on it as part of the debate and before it is eventually voted on at third reading in the House and sent to the other chamber.

As we saw at report stage, this bill has the unanimous support of the House. All members voted to support it. It has not been the subject of heated debates, from what I saw today, although it is relatively important. I will try not to repeat too much of what I said at second reading before it was referred to committee. On that point, the committee study went pretty well. There were no amendments to this bill, but still, there were some good debates. I will try to summarize them for the House to illustrate some of the dangers possibly in store for us regarding this bill, which simply aims to update the tax treaties we already have with 93 countries around the world. That said, it is anything but simple.

Concluding tax agreements with countless countries has almost become Canada's trademark. Other countries do not have so many tax agreements. Nevertheless, these tax treaties are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they help avoid double taxation. In other words, companies and individuals are not taxed twice on the same income. That makes sense when we are talking about similar administrations with similar tax rates. Obviously a person should not have to pay twice on the same income in two different places, especially when their tax rate is similar. It makes sense to establish this type of connection with other countries to eliminate double taxation, whether informally or formally, as in the case of the 93 countries with which we have such agreements. This allows individuals and companies to have a residence in either country and be taxed according to their country of residence.

However, it makes less sense to sign tax treaties with tax havens. That is what Canada is doing with its trademark tax treaties, but it is sort of glossing over the fact that it has signed treaties with tax havens like Barbados, which has a tax rate of 0.5% to 2% for foreign corporations.

Canada's trademark is even seeping into its tax policy. It will not say so openly, but it is very happy to have a treaty with Barbados, a

country where Canadians invest heavily year after year. Barbados is often the third or fourth biggest destination for Canadian foreign direct investment, after the United States and the United Kingdom.

That is no coincidence. It is not because the Barbadian economy is booming, because tons of new hotels and banks are going up, because its population is flourishing and wealthy, or because things are hopping there. It is simply because the government's unspoken tax policy allows Canadian companies to outsource their subsidiaries abroad; they can open a subsidiary in Barbados, which they use as a Canadian financial centre from which to run their international business instead of establishing a headquarters in Canada and doing business out of Canada. That is why we need to be cautious and make sure tax treaties are being used appropriately in cases where countries have similar administrations.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

• (1820)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I will not interrupt for long. I saw that he was pausing.

[*English*]

I would like to table the government's response to Order Paper Questions Nos. 2246 to 2264.

• (1825)

BILL C-82—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreements could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the third reading stage of Bill C-82, An Act to implement a multilateral convention to implement tax treaty related measures to prevent base erosion and profit shifting. Therefore, under the provisions of Standing 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the respective stage of the bill.

* * *

CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT

BILL C-93—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreements could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-93, An Act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis. Therefore, under the provisions of Standing 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the respective stage of the bill. I hope that we can find a better way forward.

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

MULTILATERAL INSTRUMENT IN RESPECT OF TAX CONVENTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-82, An Act to implement a multilateral convention to implement tax treaty related measures to prevent base erosion and profit shifting, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was saying that there has been a form of unanimity on the bill, and that we must be careful with tax treaties on the whole.

The bill was introduced and debated because we want to modernize tax conventions to prevent them from being abused, as the government itself has stated. At committee, for one, the government said that tax conventions were being abused. Bill C-82 can help with this by modernizing these conventions and ensuring that they are not abused in future.

It is an admission of guilt by the government to recognize that, although the conventions have good intentions, some taxpayers abuse them. The bill will clarify the language of these conventions to ensure that this no longer occurs and that the courts have more teeth to enforce the provisions of the convention pertaining to the fight against tax evasion. This bill attempts to address the loopholes in these conventions.

The fundamental problem, which was also brought up in committee, is that the modernization of these treaties requires the support of both countries that are party to the tax treaties. There are 93 treaties, and not only will Canada have to ratify Bill C-82, but the co-contracting country will also have to ratify an equivalent bill in its own jurisdiction so that the instrument can be implemented in both countries and the new and improved treaty can be applied. In my opinion, that severely limits the future scope of the bill.

What we were told in committee is that both countries are indeed required to complete the ratification process for the convention to take effect. To date, only 12 to 15 countries have ratified this sort of bill and done the same thing that Canada is in the process of doing today. That means there are still about 80 countries that have not yet taken such action and may not even be in the process of doing so. The best example I can give is that of Barbados. Barbados signed the document during a nice photo op. The only thing the country has not done is initiate its own legislative process, which is required to implement the convention.

I find that troubling, because I am not convinced that all the partners of these 93 countries are going to sign them. This legitimizes to some extent the countries that are so-called tax havens, which will continue to exist and might just sign the document for a nice photo op but do nothing afterwards. That will only perpetuate the problem. If this instrument is going to improve the treaty, both countries have to sign it. If either country does not sign it, there is absolutely no point to the treaty, and we will be left with the old system, the old treaty that, by the government's own admission, is not working properly and has loopholes that the courts cannot close. That is the legal and inherent limit to this bill, which means that its enforcement will also be quite limited.

It will be up to us to look at it again in the future. It will be up to legislators and the government to keep a close eye on the situation in other countries. Having nice signing ceremonies is all well and good, but if we cannot move forward and if we decide to let it go and not assume our responsibilities, we will wind up with the same problem.

One thing that was clearly stated during the committee's study was that this bill might be limited in scope, so we need to take a closer look at that. We also need to make sure that we are monitoring the countries we have these agreements with over time.

Bill C-82 will make for better treaties. I would like to thank the NDP for that because we are the ones who, for years, have been urging the government to renegotiate all the tax treaties people are abusing. Members may recall that, two years ago, my caucus was behind a motion the House adopted to, among other things, renegotiate tax treaties. We should all thank the NDP leader for his insistence on tax fairness, because it is thanks to him that renegotiation is happening now.

• (1830)

We will have to make sure that everyone follows through on these promises and that the new instrument is implemented by the countries with which we have signed treaties.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Sherbrooke will have 10 minutes for questions and answers when the House resumes consideration of this motion.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, the closure of the Chinese market to Canadian canola seed has been a major blow to Saskatchewan's economy.

I am proud to have been the only member of the House to have risen in March to ask the government a question specifically about canola. On March 22, I asked what actions the government was taking to reopen the Chinese market and to support our canola farmers until this was rectified.

On the point of supporting our canola farmers, I would note that the Saskatchewan government has since called on the federal government to expand the advance payment program to provide loans of up to a million dollars, interest-free, while this crisis persists.

At the international trade committee meeting last Tuesday, I asked the Minister of Agriculture whether the federal government was prepared to make that enhancement to the advance payment program. Her response was essentially that the government had a working group that would meet to consider options this past Thursday.

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That meeting has come and gone, and we still do not have a clear idea of what the federal government plans to do to support our farmers during this crisis. Farmers need to make decisions about what to plant and how to manage their operations. Of course, those decisions would be informed by information about what the government planned to do, whether it would be to increase the loan amounts available under the advance payment program, whether it would be to change or, hopefully, eliminate the interest due on those loans or whether the response would be through some other program.

The second part of my question had to do with reopening the Chinese market. On this point, there has been a bit of debate between the opposition pushing for the government to escalate things to a higher diplomatic level and the government trying to deal with it as more of a technical issue, without escalating it into a bigger diplomatic fight.

Without weighing in to that bigger diplomatic question, we did hear some optimistic things at the trade committee. One of them was that China would have a great deal of difficulty replacing the quantity and quality of canola that it received from Canada from other suppliers. That suggests to me that there is a good possibility of getting the Chinese market reopened.

The second reason for optimism is that Canada can try to develop some alternative markets for canola. We would be hard-pressed to really replace the Chinese market, but I would like to reiterate the call for the government to do everything that it can do to open other markets.

A final optimistic note is that while canola seed has been excluded from the Chinese market, exports of canola oil really have not been affected. It is a sealed product. It is really not subject to the same sort of phytosanitary objections.

There are many reasons to expand Canada's canola processing capacity, mostly to add to our economy and to create jobs in that processing sector. However, this latest trade dispute with China really underscores another reason to continue investing in canola processing. The finished product, the oil, is much less vulnerable to these diplomatically motivated phytosanitary types of concerns.

I am wondering if the government will take action on these fronts.

• (1835)

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for raising this important issue. I share with him the sense of urgency that he is expressing about this matter.

Canola farmers are very important to our economy. Today, Canada's canola industry contributes almost \$27 billion to the Canadian economy, a contribution that has tripled over the last 10 years.

This is why the canola trade issue with China is a top priority for Canada. We take this issue very seriously and are working hard to resolve the disruption of our canola trade with China. We are pushing on all fronts, using every available channel on the ground both in China and here in Canada, working closely with industry and the provinces.

It is important to approach this issue on the grounds of science. Canadian officials inspected the canola seed shipments using appropriate procedures and analysis prior to export, and certified shipments as per China's import requirements. We stand by our robust inspection system and will continue to stand up for Canada's canola industry.

Plant health experts from Canada and China are talking, and they will continue to exchange technical information. Our goal is to find a science-based solution to this issue as quickly as possible.

The Prime Minister recently met with leaders in the canola industry to seek their input on a way forward. He stated that Canada is looking at sending a high-level delegation to China. We are very eager to sit down face to face with our Chinese partners.

At the same time, we continue to diversify our trade in global markets to give our growers and farmers more markets for their canola and to help mitigate the risk of market closures.

In the past 18 months, we have signed two new trade agreements with some of our top markets in the world, the European Union, and the CPTPP, which is the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

With all of our trade agreements in place, Canadian canola producers have a competitive edge in two-thirds of the global marketplace.

The government stands shoulder to shoulder with Canadian producers and wants to ensure that they have the support they need. This is why there are programs in place, as my colleague mentioned, that are designed to support farmers. For example, the advance payments program provides cash advances of up to \$400,000, with the first \$100,000 interest-free. That helps producers so that they can decide when to best market their crops. The advance payments program is part of a full set of programs to help them manage risk due to severe market volatility.

At the same time, we need to resolve the trade issue with China. We will not rest until the situation is resolved.

We are in regular and ongoing communication with industry and all stakeholders. We are standing up for our canola producers and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the update from the parliamentary secretary about some of the talks that continue with China. I would really like to focus, though, on what the government is doing or is perhaps failing to do to support our canola farmers until this situation is rectified.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned the current parameters of the advance payment program; that is, loans of up to \$400,000, interest-free on the first increment. However, the question he did not answer is whether the government is willing to improve that program, on a temporary or a permanent basis, in response to this crisis with the Chinese market being closed. I would reiterate that the Saskatchewan government has asked for the advance payments program to be improved to provide loans for up to \$1 million, interest-free.

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If the government is willing to do that, it would be excellent. If the federal government is not willing to make that change, it should be prepared to explain why, and to present some sort of alternative measures to support canola farmers who are currently excluded from the Chinese market.

• (1840)

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question. While I understand the sense of urgency and that he wants a firm answer right now, what I can assure him is that we continue to be in conversation with the industry. We continue to be in conversation with all stakeholders about steps moving forward, not only on how we can resolve the current trade challenge with China but how we can continue to support our farmers.

I understand that my colleague is pushing for an answer. We share that frustration with him. We are deeply concerned about this issue. I want to reiterate to him our commitment to continue to work with farmers, producers and all stakeholders in resolving this issue.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise this evening to follow up on a question I first asked in this place on November 23, 2018, regarding high-speed Internet for rural communities.

Certainly my riding of Perth—Wellington is one of those ridings that still has too many pockets where it is still impossible for families, small businesses, local farmers and farm businesses to access reliable high-speed Internet. In 2019, it is completely unacceptable that so many Canadians still lack reliable high-speed Internet.

When I originally asked my question back in November of 2018, the Auditor General's report entitled "Reporting on Connectivity in Rural and Remote Areas" had just come out. In that report, it states:

Many detailed examinations of the state of broadband access in Canada have recommended that the federal government lead the creation of a national broadband strategy. However, the government has not agreed to take that step. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (the Department) knew the extent of broadband access across the country and had programs and other initiatives focusing on Internet access in rural and remote areas. However, we found that it did not have a strategy in place to improve access for almost 3.7 million Canadians.

That report simply confirmed what the people in Perth—Wellington already knew: that the government is failing rural Canadians when it comes to rural high-speed Internet.

We live in a world that is dependent on effective and reliable high-speed Internet. It is no longer a luxury but a necessity, and it is a necessity for those who live in our riding. Unfortunately, I know too many people in my riding who have to rely on two separate Internet providers to ensure they have Internet when they need it. It is frustrating for families, farmers and small business owners when they do not have access to the Internet.

I know the government will try to tout some of its past programs, such as its Connect to Innovate program. Here are the facts. In my riding alone, I know of at least four projects that have been waiting since the fall of 2016 to hear back on their applications one way or the other, either positively or as a rejection. These applications were due in November of 2016, yet we still do not have the results one way or the other.

That is unacceptable for the small local ISPs in my riding that are trying to do their best to provide high-speed Internet for their communities.

In fact, one of the local service providers in my home community has been able to put high-speed Internet fibre to each farm, farm business and household on its own within its incumbent local exchange carrier, its ILEC. It did that. However, it cannot expand beyond that to the areas where the big telecom companies have failed to bring fibre to Perth—Wellington communities that are lacking it because the current government is failing to act on that matter.

I want to highlight some of the local initiatives that have done so much.

The SWIFT initiative, for example, is working to bring high-speed Internet across the community. Services and organizations such as the Wellington County Library are now lending mobile hot spots. One of its most commonly used services is high-speed Internet mobile hot spots, which it loans out so that families can have access to high-speed Internet.

However, the current government comes out with no meaningful plan. It has come out with a 2030 plan, yet it has no resources to actually connect rural Canadians to high-speed Internet. Therefore, I again ask the government why it is failing rural Canadians when it comes to high-speed Internet.

• (1845)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Perth—Wellington for asking that important question.

[English]

Let us rest assured that our government has a plan and that we have put resources to that plan. Our government is committed to the needs of rural Canada. When the government develops a plan on infrastructure, such as the Investing in Canada plan, we design it with these objectives in mind.

[Translation]

The plan was designed to invest in our economy, to help Canada shift to a green economy and to help the middle class and workers who want to join it. That plan is the invest in Canada plan.

[English]

The Investing in Canada plan does all of these through its five dedicated investment streams, including rural economic development for communities. In fact, the plan includes \$2 billion in dedicated funds for rural and northern communities.

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[Translation]

We have also boosted our support for approved infrastructure projects in those communities that are cost-shared with territories and indigenous communities. To support small communities and municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents, the federal portion of projects shared with the provinces rose from 33% to 60%. That is a significant increase.

[English]

For communities in the territories, the federal share of project funding can be up to 75%.

Since the minister's appointment, Canada's new Minister of Rural Economic Development has been hard at work, meeting with Canadians in communities across the country. We are meeting and engaging with members of these rural communities to hear them and to find out how their communities can succeed and thrive. We are examining what we've heard and are working with other departments as a whole-of-government approach to develop a broader strategy that will support rural economic development all across Canada.

Part of the new Minister of Rural Economic Development's mandate is to increase high-speed broadband coverage in rural Canada. This will position rural Canada for the success of the digital economy. Access to high-speed Internet is critically important to the success of large and medium-sized businesses. We know that regardless of where people live, high-speed Internet is needed in order to get Canadian products to global markets.

[Translation]

Reliable high-speed Internet will give rural Canadians access to better health care, education and government services. It will also allow them to stay in contact with their friends and family around the world.

[English]

In fact, budget 2019 includes our commitment to ensure that all Canadians have access by 2030, as the member mentioned, but also significant investments in broadband infrastructure will connect 90% of households by 2021. Our government is leveraging the funding from a number of sources to meet that commitment.

Also, we have the universal broadband fund, the connect to innovate program, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, the CRTC and others. Our government is working closely with the provinces and territories to develop a strategy that will benefit all Canadians.

[Translation]

It is important to work with provinces and municipalities to develop a strategy that will meet the needs of rural communities in Canada.

● (1850)

[English]

It is very important to continue working, and we have put that money in budget 2019 to look at working closely with the municipalities and the provinces.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, the member talks about budget 2019. However, we know that budget 2019 was not really a budget.

It was a document of distractions. The Liberals have thrown out figures, they have thrown out numbers and they have thrown out this 2030 date, but their plans to date and their efforts to date have largely failed. They talked about the tiny deficits that were promised for three years in exchange for infrastructure investments, but in rural southern Ontario we are not seeing those infrastructure investments, particularly when it comes to the important digital infrastructure.

Rural communities in my riding of Perth—Wellington have failed to see any meaningful investment in the digital infrastructure that is necessary for our businesses, our farmers, our farm families and our agribusinesses to compete on an international scale in the 21st century. This budget did nothing to alleviate those concerns other than promise money, but there is no plan to get to 2030. Frankly, on this side of the House, we have a great deal of caution when it comes to these promises from the Liberals.

Again, I go back to my original question. Why has the current Liberal government failed to make the necessary investments in digital infrastructure in rural communities over the last three and a half years?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, we have invested in broadband more than any other government has done. I would like to point out for the member that a lot of the caucus members here advocated to have a minister responsible for rural economic development. I would like to remind the member that the previous Harper government cut the rural secretariat in 2012. Therefore, we have put a ministry in place to look at developing a rural strategy. It is not only developing a strategy but also looking at putting dollars toward that. There are significant dollars in budget 2019; \$1.8 billion has been added and we are going to look at furthering that investment.

Therefore, yes, I understand it is important. In the member's riding, there are challenges, but there are challenges across the country. This government has put a plan in place, has put the resources in place and we are going to look at working with the provinces over the next several years to ensure that we have high-speed Internet connection for people and for businesses all across the country.

CANADA POST

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is worth opening by saying, for those who may be following along at home, that adjournment proceedings are meant as an opportunity to follow up on brief exchanges that happened in question period about particular issues.

This is the third time in as many months that I am up on my feet to follow up on questions I asked in the fall that had to do with the behaviour of Canada Post management during the rotating strike of postal workers in the fall, particularly the decision made by Canada Post management to stop paying sick and vulnerable workers who were on the short-term disability plan during that strike, as a negotiating tactic.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have heard a lot of non-answers and unsatisfactory answers about why the government condoned that decision. I have heard, for instance, that really, it was not that mean a thing to do, because even though they were cutting off their short-term disability payments, people could still access EI and could even apply to get the benefits they were entitled to back. Some of them did, but others did not. I do not think that answer passes muster at all. There is nothing compassionate about cutting off a benefit people are entitled to and then allowing them to apply to get it back.

I have heard that the government would not intervene in the management practices of Canada Post, despite the fact that the Canada Post Act clearly gives the minister the authority to issue a directive, and she could have told Canada Post to stop doing that. It is not really a good answer from a government that has shown that it is willing to inappropriately try to influence an auditor general to drop a criminal proceeding when it had no business doing that at all. The question, then, is why the government would not intervene to help workers when a public corporation made a bad decision and it had the lawful authority to do so.

We have heard all sorts of half answers, non-answers and distractions about why the government did not use the tools at its disposal to intervene and say, "There is a rotating strike going on, and it is completely unacceptable for a Crown corporation to be picking on its most sick and vulnerable workers as a negotiating tactic."

The government could have said that it was something it did not support and then disallowed Canada Post doing it. It would not have affected whatever happened, ultimately, at the bargaining table. This was not a bargaining issue. This was an issue of management practices during a strike. The fact of the matter is that the government decided to be a party to that decision to deliberately target sick and vulnerable workers, because it did nothing to stop it when it could. I still have not heard an answer as to why.

Therefore, for the people who for five weeks did not receive their already limited pay, I want someone from the government to stand up and explain to them why the government thought that was acceptable.

•(1855)

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for bringing up this important issue.

I am happy to rise today to speak about our government's introduction of back-to-work legislation to ensure the resumption and continuation of services at Canada Post.

[*Translation*]

Our government has always recognized that unions play an important role in protecting workers' rights and in growing the middle class.

[*English*]

I would remind the House that under the previous government, many of the fundamental labour rights that unions fought to secure

were rolled back. It was more difficult for workers to organize freely, bargain collectively in good faith and work in a safe environment.

[*Translation*]

When we came to power, we restored fair and balanced labour laws that recognize the important role that unions play in Canada. We abolished Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which weakened Canada's union movement.

[*English*]

We recognize that unions are important in helping the middle class grow and prosper. We also believe in a fair and balanced approach to labour relations.

[*Translation*]

This is why the government did everything it could to support Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and encourage them to sign new collective agreements.

[*English*]

However, despite our efforts, the parties were unable to reach an agreement. We brought in back-to-work legislation, Bill C-89-, on November 22. The rotating strikes ended and postal services resumed.

On December 10, the Minister of Labour appointed Elizabeth MacPherson, a former chair of the Canada Industrial Relations Board, to help the parties reach new collective agreements.

The most recent collective agreements have been extended until new agreements can be reached. The work stoppage at Canada Post has had significant negative impacts on Canadians, charities, businesses of all sizes, international commerce and Canada Post, its workers and their families.

Canadians and businesses rely on Canada Post and its workers, especially during the busy retail season. We had to take action. Let me be clear that back-to-work legislation was a last resort, but a necessary one after having exhausted all other options. It was necessary to avoid future harm to the economy.

We took these steps, and we continue to ensure that there are fair negotiations between Canada Post and its union to reach a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to follow up on that. I do hope the member will consider speaking to the question I pose in his next response.

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The fact is that when SNC-Lavalin came to the government and said that it had a problem and needed a change, it received a legislative change and then the full force of the PMO putting inappropriate pressure on the former attorney general to drop a criminal proceeding. When workers on short-term disability at Canada Post during a rotating strike came and asked for help to receive their short-term disability benefits, the government did absolutely nothing, despite having a lawful authority, under the Canada Post Act, to issue a directive and tell it to stop suspending those payments.

I want to know why that big company received all the special treatment in the world, a bending of the rules, and workers on short-term disability could not even get the time of day?

• (1900)

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, it is really important that both parties sit down to negotiate. Both parties have to look at elements in the collective agreement. As the member mentioned, this is something that needs to be negotiated. It needs to be outlined by both parties in order to support the workers.

[*Translation*]

The government did not want to resort to back-to-work legislation, but discussions with the union and workers were necessary.

[*English*]

Of course, the best outcome is one that is reached by both parties negotiating at the table. However, if it cannot happen, then the government has to intervene. Back-to-work legislation was a last resort after having exhausted every other option.

It is important to remain confident that the mediator and arbitrator will work on the issues mentioned, as well as other issues, so both parties can find a solution that results in a win-win situation. We will continue to monitor the situation closely as the days, weeks and months progress.

[*Translation*]

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

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

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