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Tuesday, October 27, 2020

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 27, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 23(5) of the Auditor General Act, the 2020 fall reports of the interim commissioner of the environment and sustainable development to the House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

These reports are deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

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OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator for 2019-20, as required under section 192 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

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[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion.

I move:

That the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be designated as the committee responsible for the statutory review of section 285 of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.

The Speaker: This being a hybrid sitting of the House, for the sake of clarity, I will ask for only those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement.

Accordingly, all those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay. Hearing none, it is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay. There being no dissenting voices, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a second motion. There have been discussions among the parties, and I suspect if you were to canvass the House you would find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development be designated as the committee responsible for the statutory review of section 343 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: This being a hybrid sitting of the House, for the sake of clarity, I will only ask those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement. Accordingly, all those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed will please say nay. There being no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have five petitions to present today.

The first petition calls on the House of Commons and the government to pass two bills from the last Parliament, Bill C-350 and Bill S-240. These bills would make it illegal to travel abroad to receive a harvested organ.

Government Orders

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, signed by hundreds of Canadians, calls on the government to create a national strategy on palliative care. This would ensure that all Canadians have access to high-quality palliative care until the end of their lives and that Canadians are comfortable at the time of their death. Canadians who signed this petition would like the government to establish a national palliative care strategy.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is from Canadians across Canada who are calling on the House of Commons to protect the conscience rights of physicians and health care institutions. They recognize that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects freedom of conscience and religion. They also note that the Canadian Medical Association has confirmed conscience rights do not interfere with access to health care.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fourth petition is signed by Canadians across the country who are concerned about what has been shown in the CBC exposé called *It's a Girl*. The petitioners highlight that over two million girls worldwide are missing because of gendercide and that the gender imbalance crisis is leading to an increase in violence and the trafficking of women and girls. They point out that in Canada, 92% of Canadians are opposed to gender-selective abortions. The petitioners are looking for the government and the House to pass the gender selection bill soon.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last petition I would like to present highlights the plight of the Uighurs in China. It is calling for the House and the Government of Canada to recognize the genocide that is being perpetrated against the Uighur population in China and for the Government of Canada to use the Magnitsky act to end this horrible atrocity.

The Speaker: I remind all hon. members to be concise when presenting petitions, and I compliment the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock for doing an exemplary job of that. That was very good.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from October 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I continue with my comments from yesterday.

After listening to the debate yesterday, I wanted to highlight a couple of important points that were made. I believe the most important one is that people should feel free to be who they are. The consequences of societal pressures on people to conform to something they are not cause a great deal of stress and anxiety that leads to some very severe consequences. We heard about some of those consequences yesterday. The most extreme of these, of course, which is a sad reality, is that some people will ultimately commit suicide. This is not to mention the many other things that will take place as a result of society and attitudes that really need to change.

This is not to say we have not made progress. I am 58 years old, and in my generation there has been a great deal of change over the years. I am encouraged by that. Yesterday one of my colleagues said that we want to make Canada the safest place to fall in love, and that speaks of Canada's rich diversity. Diversity goes far beyond our wonderful ethnic diversity. It should incorporate all aspects of the human being and our society in general, and we should be very proud of it.

As I have indicated, I truly believe in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and how important our standing in the world is regarding the degree to which we recognize the importance of freedom. I am therefore encouraged to see this legislation. What I found really encouraging yesterday, in listening to discussions on the issues of conversion therapy, is that it seems everyone inside the House opposes it and sees the type of harm it causes in society. A number of members have raised issues and wanted some clarification, but on principle, the House appears to be unanimous in its thinking regarding the dangers of conversion therapy. I hope we will see unanimous support for this legislation, because I believe it is worth being supported by all members of this chamber.

I will be specific with what the legislation would criminalize. We should all note this. It would criminalize causing a person under the age of 18, a minor, to undergo conversion therapy; removing a minor from Canada to undergo conversion therapy abroad; causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against their will; receiving financial or other material benefits from the provision of conversion therapy; and advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy. The essence of what this bill would do is protect minors from conversion therapy regardless of whether it is provided within or outside of Canada, protect adults who are vulnerable to being forced to undergo conversion therapy and protect Canadians from the commercialization of conversion therapy.

Government Orders

I see this as a positive step forward, and I want to reflect on some of the comments I made yesterday, and already this morning, on the degree to which things have changed.

• (1015)

I can recall my school days quite vividly, and I had no sense of what “gay” was. It was not even talked about in school. I had no sense, in terms of any type of behaviour, of what was being perceived or pushed on from the norms of society. It was not until the latter years of high school I started to get a sense there was a part of life that I was not privy to, or that was frowned upon.

When I went into the Canadian Forces, I really started to see discrimination against people who were gay, and the negative impacts of being gay. I suspect I do not need to cite specific examples for people to understand some of the things I am implying with that statement.

Once I entered the political realm in the mid-eighties, things were taking place that were actually fairly encouraging. For example, the Pride parade in Winnipeg was established in 1987. It was not meant to be a Pride parade, per se, but it was a gathering of people with respect to an action from the Manitoba legislature. The action would have included sexual orientation as part of the Manitoba Human Rights Code. Hundreds of people were gathering, either to protest the fact that it did not pass or to celebrate the fact it did pass. It turned into a parade. That was really significant back in the eighties.

Fast-forwarding 25 years, it is really encouraging to look at the Manitoba legislature. Located in downtown Winnipeg in a beautiful building, the chamber, with its horseshoe shape, is one of the finest debating chambers in Canada and possibly even North America. Huge Roman heritage pillars are at the very front of the building. It has a beautiful lawn. About 25 years after that first Pride parade, we saw a celebration and the different colours of the rainbow shining up the pillars. We recognized just how far we have come. It was part of a week of Pride celebrations.

We need to think of the impact that has on our community. It is very difficult for us to comprehend the pressures people are under when hiding their feelings. Because of my upbringing, it is very hard for someone like me to imagine that. I can only attempt to understand the difficulty of young people, in particular, dealing with a very difficult situation in their school, home or work lives. The least I can do is to encourage that freedom where I can. Bill C-6 is a good example. It sends a positive message, but the work is not done. We can still do so much more.

The other thing I am very proud of is the fact that Glen Murray was the first openly gay mayor of a major urban centre in Canada: my home city of Winnipeg.

• (1020)

I thank Glen Murray and Randy Boissonnault from the Liberal caucus, both people I have known over the years who have been such strong advocates, and my daughter to a certain degree, for making sure I am sensitive and have a better, more comprehensive understanding of an issue that is important to all of us.

• (1025)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, through you to my colleague across the way, I have a couple of quick points.

First, he mentioned at the start of his speech that he was confused as to whether he was 57 or 58 years old. I would appreciate that clarification.

I would like to note that I learned something new about him, which is that he served in the Canadian Armed Forces in the past. We will have that discussion.

Some of the previous members spoke about potential amendments to the bill and what they would like to see. I would like to state that conversion therapy is wrong and should be banned, but the Justice website previously stated:

These new offences would not criminalise private conversations in which personal views on sexual orientation, sexual feelings or gender identity are expressed such as where teachers, school counsellors, pastoral counsellors, faith leaders, doctors, mental health professionals, friends or family members who provide support to persons struggling with their sexual orientation, sexual feelings, or gender identity.

Does the member have a concern that anything in that statement would prevent it from being included in this legislation?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, on the age front, January 22, 1962, at St. Boniface Hospital, was a very special moment for my parents. I will let the member do the math.

The member brings forward a very reasonable question. From statements made by the minister, I believe that once the bill goes to committee we, as a government, are open to the possibility of making some changes working with opposition members. All I ask members of all political parties to recognize is the immense amount of consultation and work that was done to bring the legislation we have today in its current form.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member and I are both of the same age group. I remember, when I was a teenager, my queer friends were expelled from their families. It was common that if they came out to their parents, many of those young people were told they were not welcome in their own homes. I think of that because my mother goes to mass every single day, but in our home my parents always made sure that the dinner table was set for those who had been kicked out of their own families and had no place else. When we were teenagers, my father told us who we love is who we love, and that is what we must always remember. I think of how, with the young generation today and my daughter's friends, being gay or queer is not an issue. It is considered okay. We have come a long way, but we have not come far enough. I think banning conversion therapy is a huge step we have to take as a nation, to say that we will not go back and undermine the rights of people to be who they are. I want to commend my colleague for his speech.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it is important for us to recognize how things have changed and why it is so important that we continue to move forward. The very first time I had an appreciation of how society needed to change was in the early eighties, when I first heard the phrase “gay bashing.” From what I can recall, it had taken place behind the Manitoba legislature. Although I would have been in my teens or early twenties, that is when I first became aware of it. Other families were possibly far more progressive than mine, which I appreciate in one sense. That is why it is so important for me to share my thoughts with my family, and my daughter Cindy in particular is probably now even further advanced on the issue than I am.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Speaker, we are talking about removing something from our society that can create harm.

I would also like to hear the parliamentary secretary's thoughts around some of the ways we need to improve investing in services and supports: wraparound care. I am thinking about Clinic 554 in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Across the country there are things we need to do to ensure that trans health care is something we protect and invest in, as an example. I am just wondering what the member thinks about that as a conversation.

● (1030)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I absolutely think it is important that, as a government, we work with other jurisdictions and do not underestimate the value of non-profit organizations that are advocacy groups and provide direct services. I know at least two or three websites have all sorts of wonderful resources.

There is so much more there now than a decade ago. However, there is still a need for governments to work together to ensure there is that ultimate freedom for people to be who they are.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague for his speech.

Yesterday, reference was made to people who get sex changes or other such medical procedures. It was said that we should be asking ourselves some questions in that regard. Personally, I think that is confusing the issue, since the main purpose of the bill currently before us is to protect children from unacceptable treatment.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I took the time to specifically read what the bill does. It is important because it is a significant step in terms of criminalizing conversion therapy. It is something I believe the vast majority of Canadians would support, because it is long overdue.

The member made reference to medical procedures. I am not quite as comfortable talking about that, because I do not know the details offhand.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Winnipeg North for his speech. I enjoyed lis-

tening to it. We come from the same province, and I am familiar with some of the stories he told.

My question is regarding youth and children's volunteers. Many community organizations in my constituency have volunteers who give of their time to work with young people and adolescents. We know that many adolescents struggle with their sexual identity and have sexual dysphoria. They often go to leaders in their groups, whether coaches or youth leaders in a church or a community organization, to share their struggles. I have heard back from many constituents. Just last week I heard from people who work as leaders with middle school folks in an organization.

What are they supposed to do when someone comes to talk to them, looking for some clarification as to their sexual identity? Some believe, the way they read this legislation, that they could possibly be criminalized for that. I would like the hon. member to provide some clarity.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect that once the bill goes to committee, through the presentations that will be made and the question-and-answer sessions, we will have a lot more clarity on the issue.

There are also Government of Canada websites, as well as the minister's opening comments in the introduction to the bill, that address many of the concerns the member raised. That is why I look forward to the bill ultimately going to committee and then coming back to the House.

I am hopeful that members on all sides of the House appreciate the value in seeing this legislation pass. I would like to see it pass through the House of Commons before the end of the year.

● (1035)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Shefford.

When the government said it was going to crack down on conversion therapy, the Bloc Québécois was very pleased, especially since the government had previously said it could do nothing following an April 2019 petition to ban the practice.

The Bloc Québécois views conversion therapy not as a medical procedure but as a barbaric practice designed to negate an individual's identity. Conversion therapy is pseudoscience. It is dangerous and degrading for those subjected to it, and it is totally ineffective to boot. People who provide sexual reorientation therapy are not health professionals. No self-respecting professional could provide this so-called service without realizing that it is essentially an affront to their profession.

This is 2020. It is about time we acknowledged that attraction to individuals of the same sex is a normal variation of human behaviour. It is therefore our duty to protect the victims of conversion therapy proponents, who tend to have very conservative religious views. We know the groups that promote conversion therapy are small and marginal, but we want to reaffirm that respecting beliefs goes hand in hand with respecting differences and ensuring the equality of all. Members of the LGBTQ2 community must get the respect they deserve as soon as possible.

Historically, Quebec has been a leader in human rights. The Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms has recognized sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination since 1977. It should also be noted that the gay and lesbian community has made significant gains since 1999. For example, in June 1999, the Government of Quebec passed Bill 32 to amend various legislative provisions concerning same-sex couples. Other bills followed. Bill C-23 passed on January 1, 2001, and Bill 84 passed in June 2002. The federal government passed Bill C-38 on June 28, 2005. Even public and parapublic sectors negotiated protections for the LGBTQ2 community into their collective agreements.

Just because certain rights were recognized, including the recognition of same-sex spouses, it does not mean that every barrier of discrimination against homosexuality will come down overnight. These were important gains, but members of that community might agree that despite these societal advances, there is still a lot of work to do to eliminate the discrimination they endure. For gay youth and adults, the path to equality is strewn with many obstacles including ignorance and prejudice, labelling and discrimination, harassment and aggression.

Not so long ago, epidemiologist Travis Salway found that suicide is the leading cause of death among gay and bisexual men in Canada and he tried to understand why. He believes this is related to what is known as minority stress, which often leads to persistent negative thoughts and a feeling of despair. What is more, Mr. Salway has officially spoken out against sexual reorientation therapy.

In Canada, 47,000 sexual minority men have undergone conversion therapy. We do not have the figures for women, but that is a significant number of men. In Quebec, Gabriel Nadeau, a former member of a Pentecostal Protestant community who went through conversion therapy not once, not twice, but three times, has been speaking out on behalf of people who are being asked to be heterosexual despite being strongly attracted to someone of the other sex. His testimony is chilling:

In my community, it was believed that homosexuality was an evil spirit...I knew that exorcisms were performed.

That sounds like a movie.

• (1040)

Mr. Nadeau now accepts himself for who he is. He says that he would never return to his religious prison. I commend him for his strength and resilience, and I wish him all the best.

Not all stories end well, however. Conversion therapy can leave deep scars, as explained by the Canadian Psychological Association. It notes that such practices can result in negative outcomes such as distress, anxiety, depression, negative self-image, social

Government Orders

isolation, a feeling of personal failure, difficulty sustaining relationships and sexual dysfunction.

The members of the Bloc Québécois are unanimously opposed to conversion therapy, because we believe that equality between Quebecers is a fundamental value and an inalienable right in Quebec. Practices that deny the existence of a person's core identity must be condemned. We are pleased to see what is happening here, in the House of Commons.

In Quebec, respect for gender identity and sexual orientation is a value, and conversion therapy violates that value. That is why we will be supporting Bill C-6, which amends the Criminal Code to criminalize the following: causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against the person's will; causing a child to undergo conversion therapy; doing anything for the purpose of removing a child from Canada with the intention that the child undergo conversion therapy outside Canada; advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy; and receiving a financial or other material benefit from the provision of conversion therapy.

The Bloc Québécois has always been deeply committed to protecting and promoting the rights and freedoms of citizens. We have always been quick to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation. In fact, Quebec is following suit, as it is also looking at legislation. The Bloc Québécois is certainly very pleased that both parliaments are recognizing that, in a democracy, there is good reason to affirm collective values and regulate religious practices that go contrary to those values under the law.

I will end on a somewhat more personal note. I have always believed that what parents want first and foremost is for their children to be happy and for there to be no obstacles to this happiness. When my son told me he was gay, I felt sad. I was not sad because he was homosexual, but because I knew that he would face discrimination and have to endure insults. Like many others, he has been the victim of homophobia.

By passing Bill C-6, I believe that we will help create a society where the LGBTQ2 community will be better protected. I also believe that it is our duty to work with this community to help them to overcome the prejudices they experience.

[English]

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am concerned that an aspect of this issue is not being discussed. The LGBT community has many different members in it and they do not all have the same opinion.

Government Orders

I want to read a brief excerpt from an email I received from a constituent, a person in the LGBT community. She says, “Dear [member of Parliament for Hastings—Lennox and Addington]. As a lesbian, I’m asking you to investigate the use of “gender identity” in Bill C-6. Approximately 75% of trans-identifying youth will grow up to be gay or lesbian if not affirmed and medically transitioned. This bill, as written, ensures that these gay and lesbian youth will be medically transitioned into straight adults.”

Could the member please address the concern of this woman, that people who would otherwise grow up to be gay or lesbian would be affirmed into transitioning, using irreversible medical and pharmaceutical means? This is a real concern from people in the LGBT community. Is the member not concerned that this is a legitimate concern of these people?

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Madam Speaker, I am not sure that I understood my colleague's comments.

I think that the intent of Bill C-6, just like the intent of the bill studied by Quebec, is to protect people's rights. It is about respecting their sexual identity, whatever that may be. It is part of who we are. If that is the tenor of her comments, I would say that we do have to work with community members to help them make progress and achieve true equality for all Canadians.

• (1045)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I, too, was pleased to see the Government of Quebec follow suit with Bill 70. I think that is the perfect example of how the two levels of government can work together toward a common goal. Does the member agree that the federal government has a role to play with regard to the Criminal Code and Bill C-6?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Madam Speaker, we recognize that the Criminal Code falls under federal jurisdiction, while the Civil Code falls under Quebec's jurisdiction.

It is under the Civil Code that Quebec's bill was introduced, to protect individuals from any possible contract, whether they are an adult or a minor. Quebec is going that far. The Quebec bill targets charlatans as well as those who seek their services for a family member, whether it is a child or someone else. I therefore think that the two bills will work well together.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question for my colleague is with respect to a young woman. She was a minor when she transitioned and experienced hormones after only four sessions of therapy. She noted that when she decided to de-transition, no one in the medical or psychological fields ever tried to dissuade her from her gender transition.

Is the member in favour of amendments that would ensure this type of situation would not happen, where medical and psychological professionals are apprehensive about providing a broad scope of options and recommendations to these young people? Ken Zucker,

a Canadian world-renowned gender expert, was fired from CAMH for watchful waiting approaches with young gender dysphoric youth. We have a situation here where he possibly would have also been prosecuted. This would limit these young people's perspectives and opportunities in choosing to transition and then de-transition. Therefore, would she support—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Repentigny, for a very brief answer.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

As I said earlier in my speech, not a single health care professional worthy of the name would try to convince someone or try to call this science.

I will come back to what my son said when I asked him what he thought of all this. He said it was ultra-religious, ultra-conservative groups that want this. He believes that people who are accepted by their parents—hence the importance of upbringing—and accepted by the people in their community do not need therapy. People just need to accept themselves and love themselves.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very proud to rise today to speak to Bill C-6, which amends the Criminal Code with regard to conversion therapy. I already had the opportunity to speak to this subject some time ago in response to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, and that, too, was an honour for me.

My speech today will focus on three things. First, I will talk about the importance of this bill for the LGBTQ+ community. Second, I will show how Quebec is once again at the forefront on this issue. Third, I will conclude with what I hope to see in the post-pandemic era for the LGBTQ+ community, which has been hard hit by COVID-19.

We are debating this bill today because the government has finally decided to not only ban but also criminalize the practice of conversion therapy. According to several witnesses, some of these practices are more like torture than genuine therapy. Conversion therapy has also been described as being like witchcraft or something out of a bad dream. It is hard to believe this is still happening today, in 2020.

I think that we can all agree that this practice, which is promoted and supported primarily by religious groups, is based on the idea that homosexuality is unnatural and wrong, that it is one of the most serious sins and that it could lead a person straight to hell.

Unfortunately, homophobia still exists in 2020. Expressions of it can be seen practically every day. It is frankly unacceptable that religious groups continue to stigmatize homosexuality. People in this community should not have to live in fear any longer. Human beings should not be subjected to goodness knows what kind of therapeutic process to become someone they simply are not.

Many of us know people in our circles who have admitted how hard it still is to come out of the closet and affirm their identity. This bill does not solve all the problems of the LGBTQ+ community, but it is clearly an important step in advancing the debate.

Let's get back to the issue before us today, namely conversion therapy. The media has already shared the story of a boy from Quebec who underwent one of these so-called conversion therapies, and my colleague has referenced this case, too. Anyone who takes the time to really pay attention to his story cannot help but feel empathy for him. No one could condone inflicting such anguish on someone, or imagine that a child could feel such deep self-hatred.

As the aunt of a niece and two nephews who I want to see grow up happy, I find it hard to believe that this boy's family did not have good intentions. However, his religion and his intense desire to not disappoint his loved ones or his God pushed him to use his own money to pay for so-called reparative therapy that would make him "normal". He even went so far as to describe conversion therapy as social support for self-rejection. I have mentioned that powerful, sad turn of phrase before.

What is even sadder is that this story echoes that of many children and adolescents who just want to be loved and fit in. I appreciate this government bill for trying to prevent this type of situation from happening again.

The government can obviously count on my support and that of all my colleagues, including our leader. At a press conference I attended with him, he said that members of the LGBTQ+ community must get the full respect they deserve as soon as possible, just like anyone else.

Many countries have led the way in criminalizing conversion therapy. Quebec recently started the process too, when our Minister of Justice, Simon Jolin-Barrette, introduced Bill 70 in the National Assembly. Bill 70 is called "An Act to protect persons from conversion therapy provided to change their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression".

I also want to mention that in 2018, Theresa May, the then prime minister of Great Britain, described conversion therapy intended to change an individual's sexual orientation as an "abhorrent practice".

The awful thing is that the vast majority of gay individuals ended up estranged from their families. They went off to live their lives and tried to deny who they were. Some even went through conversion therapy against their will before finally deciding to be who they really are.

● (1050)

It is very hard to put ourselves in their shoes and imagine what it is like to go through conversion therapy. Eventually, people realize that they need to stop bowing to all the pressure and acknowledge that it is not working. Conversion therapy does not transform people. Instead, people realize that it does not reflect who they really are.

Many have spent decades trying to fight against themselves with therapy, fighting their true nature, and asking themselves a lot of questions, asking themselves why. Some even wonder why they were born in their body, why they feel as they do, why they have a

Government Orders

given gender. They wonder who they really are. They end up hating or despising themselves. We do not want anyone to get to that point.

People who have gone through this kind of therapy are survivors. Now we can use Bill C-6, the conversion therapy bill, to send them a clear social and political message and take those first steps. My hope for every member of the LGBTQ+ community is not just to survive, but to be able to live in a way that is true to who they are, how they feel and who they love.

It seems that members of this community experience greater negative psychological impacts as a result of the pandemic than the rest of the population. Robert-Paul Juster, IUSMM researcher and professor of psychiatry at the University of Montreal explained:

There is a consensus that the LGBT community is at a greater risk of experiencing problems in the context of the COVID crisis simply because they do not have access to the same resources as heterosexual or cisgender people...Yes, there is a greater vulnerability due to their minority status, but there is also a greater potential for resilience.

Resilience is what I wish for them.

I would like to add one last thing. Pope Francis's statement in favour of the civil union of same-sex couples is perceived as a great demonstration of openness by experts and groups that advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. The head of the Catholic Church defended the right of gay couples, the "children of God", to live in a civil union that protects them legally, as we can hear in the documentary *Francesco*, which is about the Pope and was shown last Wednesday for the first time at the Rome Film Fest. He stated that homosexual people "have a right to a family. What we need is to legislate civil unions, as they have a right to be legally covered. I defended this." The Conseil québécois LGBTQ considers this to be a significant step for the church, which needs to adapt to our societies.

As the Bloc's critic for seniors, I want to point out that LGBTQ+ seniors, who faced prejudice and were confined during the pandemic without any resources, experienced a form of sexual mistreatment. We need to be there for them as we move forward, and this bill is an important step. We are sending a message so that the community can assert itself. Psychologists do not recognize that conversion therapy works. We must take action to prevent more suicides and to protect their rights.

Government Orders

• (1055)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the Bloc's dissertations and presentations on this issue. It seems they understand there are systemic challenges for gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and two-spirit communities. There are systems at play that disqualify their full and equal participation in society. If they can see that for the LGBTQ2S community, and they can see that for women, why can they not see it for other marginal communities in this country, including those who are racially marginalized?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I think there will be other communities we can look at, but today we are debating Bill C-6, which focuses specifically on conversion therapy, to help the LGBTQ+ community. That is what is important today. The message is for that community. There will be other bills. There will be other communities we can look at, but today I would really like to remain focused on Bill C-6.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is true that all Canadians deserve respect and protection, and members of the LGBTQ2 community, of course, deserve this protection. Conversion therapy is reprehensible, and it should be outlawed.

Earlier this year, the justice department put some language on its website that adds greater clarity. I believe there is an opportunity here to clarify this and allow more members of the broader community to support members of the LGBTQ2 community. They would know that they can have conversations and not feel separated from their families. Instead, they would know that everyone in a family or faith community can have conversations, so people would feel supported, not in spite of who they are, or to change who they are, but for who they are.

I am wondering what the member thinks about an amendment to add the language the justice department previously put on its website.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, I believe that the effect of this bill will be to promote these conversations with the community. I do not think conversations will be hindered because of it. This bill does not prevent anyone, no matter their age, from discussing and advocating for their rights. On the contrary, this is a step in the right direction. Obviously, it is just an initial step.

This bill focuses on children in particular. I think it is important and sends a clear message.

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question to the member is this: Is she concerned about whether,

if this legislation is passed in its current form, it will be challenged in the courts, as so many of these amendments to the Criminal Code tend to be?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

With regard to this legislation being challenged in the courts, I think that we need to start by passing the bill. Then we will see what happens.

I sincerely believe that we need to fight against the barbaric practice of conversion therapy, which should not still be happening in 2020. We can think about the types of court challenges that may arise, but I think that we first need to vote on this bill. That is what is important today.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague for her speech.

I would like to ask her a question about Bill C-6 and the prorogation of Parliament on August 18.

Does she think that we could have dealt with this issue more quickly had Parliament not been prorogued?

Personally, I think that we should also spend some time examining other bills.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Beauce for his question.

I completely agree with him. The prorogation of Parliament had an impact on many bills and on all of the committees that had to stop their work. I am joining the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to resume the work that had to be stopped because of prorogation.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Outremont.

I would like to start by acknowledging that I am speaking from the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

I am proud to speak today in favour of Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code in regard to conversion therapy. The bill would amend the Criminal Code to criminalize conversion therapy related conduct. The proposed amendments would protect minors from conversion therapy both within and outside of Canada, adults who are vulnerable to being forced to undergo conversion therapy and Canadians from the commercialization of conversion therapy.

Government Orders

Conversion therapy refers to alleged treatments that seek to change the sexual orientation of bisexual, gay and lesbian individuals to heterosexual, a person's gender identity to cisgender and to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or non-conforming sexual behaviour. This outdated and much maligned practice comes in many forms including counselling, behaviour modification and talk therapy.

In our 2019 platform, the government made a commitment to protect the dignity and equality of LGBTQ2 Canadians by ending the dehumanizing practice of conversion therapy. The bill supports that promise and builds on other related measures, including those from the last Parliament when we strengthened protections for transgender people in the Criminal Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act, through the former Bill C-16.

I had the pleasure of joining the health committee in the last Parliament for the study on the health of LGBTQ2 Canadians. A number of witnesses spoke about the negative impact that so-called conversion therapy has. I always hesitate to use the word “therapy” because therapy to me implies something positive while there is nothing at all positive about this discriminatory practice.

While many witnesses spoke about this issue, I want quote Dr. Travis Salway, post-doctoral research fellow at the school of population and public health at the University of B.C. who testified at committee. He said:

Conversion therapy is an umbrella term for practices that intend to change an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity. It is among the most extreme forms of psychological abuse and violence, leaving those exposed to manage the stress associated with a severe form of withholding for many years. ...conversion therapy has been unequivocally denounced by the Canadian Psychological Association and multiple other professional bodies.

Despite those denouncements, in a recent Canadian survey, 4% of sexual minority men reported having attended conversion therapy. On this basis, as many as 20,000 sexual minority men and countless more sexual minority women and transgender people have been exposed. Exposure to conversion therapy was associated with numerous health problems in the study we conducted. Most notably, one-third of those who had completed conversion therapy programs attempted suicide.

Sexual minority youth are especially vulnerable to being enrolled in conversion programs against their will, yet in Canada we lack federal policies to protect our youth from these harmful practices. Many, if not most, conversion programs are practised outside health care providers' offices. Thus, the current situation in which some provinces ban conversion practices by a subset of providers is insufficient and inequitable....

Suicide attempts, suicide ideation, treatment for anxiety or depression and illicit drug use were all higher in those who had attended conversion therapy. The health consequences are quite large. That suggests to me that as an infringement, as an assault, putting someone into conversion therapy, especially youths who aren't able to choose for themselves, is quite a serious offence....

Dr. Salway's testimony was echoed by other witnesses, which led the health committee to recommend, “That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to eliminate the practice of conversion therapy in Canada and consider making further modifications to the Criminal Code.” The bill we are debating today fulfills this recommendation, as well as the calls from advocates and the medical profession and our own commitment to end the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy.

Yesterday, the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke spoke eloquently and passionately about the bill. He quite accurately described a number of red herrings that are circulating to discredit the bill and create confusion in the public. The bill would in no way

criminalize affirming support to those struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity, given by friends, family members, teachers, social workers or religious leaders.

I have seen a flyer circulated by Campaign Life Coalition claiming that the bill would “deny spiritual guidance and pastoral care for people who identify as LGBT even if they ask for it”, and that “Many Canadians have seen their lives turned around by turning to clinical therapy, prayer and spiritual counselling to overcome unwanted same sex attraction”.

● (1105)

There were more absurd and troubling claims made, but I am not going to justify them by repeating them here in the House of Commons. I am deeply disturbed by these claims, which are fundamentally based on the belief that sexual orientation and gender identity are a choice that an individual makes. They ignore the very real harms of conversion therapy: self-hatred, depression, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.

These claims and the practice of conversion therapy as a whole also perpetuate harmful myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ2 people, in particular, that sexual orientation other than heterosexual and gender identities other than cisgender can and should be changed. This type of discriminatory messaging stigmatizes LGBTQ2 persons, undermines their dignity and goes against our shared goal of equality.

Given conversion therapy's proven harms and its impact on the most marginalized among us, this bill would define conversion therapy for Criminal Code purposes as “a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.”

Secondly, this legislation will criminalize causing minors to undergo conversion therapy, removing minors from Canada to undergo conversion therapy abroad, causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against their will, profiting or receiving a material benefit from the provision of conversion therapy and advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy.

Government Orders

Our government's approach will protect all minors from conversion therapy because we know that minors are disproportionately impacted by this harmful practice. The offences I listed above, taken together, fill a gap in the criminal law by specifically addressing conversion therapy conduct. They respond to the evidence and, together with existing offences that address aspects of conversion therapy such as assault and forcible confinement, create a comprehensive criminal law response to the harms that conversion therapy is known to cause.

The proposed offences in the bill would not include legitimate therapies, primarily because gender-affirming practices, treatments and services do not aim to change a patient's sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, nor are they aimed at repressing or reducing non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour. For greater clarity, the legislation also states that these types of practices are not captured by the definition of conversion therapy.

I want to emphasize that this legislation does not seek to, nor would it, ban open-ended conversations between an individual and a parent, another family member, faith leader or anyone else about their sexuality. Despite the claims of the Leader of the Opposition and organizations like Campaign Life, this legislation would not ban talking, but it would criminalize a heinous practice that inflicts very real and documented harms to LGBTQ2 Canadians.

We want a country that respects the differences between us. In Canada, everyone must not only feel safe to be who they are, but actually be safe. Bill C-6 would assist in ensuring that everyone feels considered, accepted, respected, valued and safe. I urge all members of this House to support this important bill.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I am glad she is on the right side of this issue and agrees that Canadian society in general and Quebec society in particular still have a ways to go.

I myself did not realize conversion therapy was even available in Canada. This bill does not seem progressive to me. It barely brings us into the 21st century. Knowing that we need a more tolerant and open society, what are we doing to ensure that society does a better job of accepting homosexual individuals in Quebec and Canada?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, that is a very important question because there are still misconceptions out there, much like I spoke about in my speech. There are flyers distributed in Canada that somehow imply that individuals who are LGBTQ2 have made a choice or that people who are struggling with their gender identity can make a choice about it. I am really troubled to hear those kinds of comments.

Quite frankly, we heard stories at the health committee, particularly about young people who grow up and struggle all their lives with depression, anxiety, suicide and suicidal ideation. Those are things we need to stamp out in our country and make sure that people are welcoming and tolerant of individuals who may be different from themselves.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate many of the interventions made by my colleagues from different parties. The member used the words “red herring” a number of times. I am concerned about the fact that it has been used to nullify some of the legitimate concerns the Leader of the Opposition and others have raised about some of the ambiguity that exists around the bill. Certainly, I have some fairly strong opinions about the fact that this bill simply had to be reintroduced because the Liberals decided to shut down Parliament.

In order to see broader support to address this issue, which I think all in the House agree on, would she be willing to explore ways to remove the ambiguity that exists in the way the legislation is written currently?

We could then do exactly what the Liberals and all members of the House want to accomplish, which is to see these coercive practices banned in this country.

• (1115)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I did use the term “red herring” and it was one that was used yesterday in the speech by the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, who has far more experience and knowledge on this issue than I do. He spoke very personally about this subject.

It is quite clear that there is absolutely nothing in the bill that would criminalize conversations. To imply that there is, I am sorry but we have to agree to disagree on this, that is the red herring. There is nothing that would criminalize conversations between people in the bill.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is lovely to be in the House and listen to the reaffirmation of Bill C-6. Of course, I am in support of the bill.

I would like to read a quote, if I may, from Dr. Kristopher Wells from Alberta. He is the Canadian chair for public understanding of sexual and gender minority youth. He writes:

It's much more underground.... It might be happening after business hours. It might be happening in a basement, or unfortunately it's still happening in some faith communities and cultural communities, under the guise of praying away the gay. Or that homosexuality doesn't exist in that community, and anyone who shows same-sex tendencies or who's gender diverse needs to be fixed or cured in order to gain acceptance in their community.

When we hear things like this, the bill is clearly not enough to address the underground impacts of homophobia. Clearly, this bill cannot repair past damages. Clearly, this bill does not address hate and homophobia in our communities. Will the member and the Liberal government commit to funding support programs and capacity-building programs for the SOGI community?

Government Orders

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, actually, this bill does address part of that. One of the things we heard at committee was that just having provinces ban the practice does not go far enough. That is why we needed a Criminal Code amendment to deal with things like what the member described, such as how these so-called therapies move underground. The bill addresses that issue.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in debate on Bill C-6, which seeks to ban conversion therapy in this country. Let us make no mistake; the proposed legislation is revolutionary. It would make Canada's laws on conversion therapy the most progressive and comprehensive in the world.

Conversion therapy is a degrading practice that targets LGBTQ2 Canadians to try to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, and can lead to lifelong trauma. There is widespread consensus in the medical community that conversion therapy is extremely harmful.

A recent study in the United States found almost 30% of LGBTQ2 youth who had experienced conversion therapy had attempted suicide. Let us think about that for a moment. Let us think about our duty as legislators, our responsibility to prohibit practices that endanger the very lives of the people we aim to protect and serve.

As with other pieces of legislation, in favour of which I have spoken, Bill C-6, for me, is also about freedom: the freedom for everyone to be who they are, the freedom to express one's gender, the freedom to express one's sexual orientation, the freedom from being forced to change and the freedom from being enticed to change by others. It is the freedom to be ourselves and only we know who that is. This is the freedom we should want for all Canadians.

[Translation]

I hope the House will stand firm and vote unanimously to support the bill, which will send a clear message to the LGBTQ2 community, to our young people and to the entire world.

I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to the many community organizations that have fought for the rights of transgender people and the entire LGBTQ2 community and continue to do so.

Back home in Mile-End, I have had the privilege of speaking with people from Fraîchement Jeudi, a community radio program that gives a voice to Montreal's LGBTQ2 community. I am also thinking of the Centre de solidarité lesbienne, located in my riding, which provides support to lesbians who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, grief, difficulty coming out or any other difficulties related to their well-being.

Montreal is home to many other organizations. Here are just a few: the Fondation Émergence, which combats homophobia and transphobia; RÉZO, which offers psychological support to LGBTQ2 men; and the Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale, or GRIS-Montréal, which works to raise awareness, especially in schools. We often think about Montreal's pride parade, which, under normal circumstances, draws millions of Montrealers. These organizations work day in and day out to ensure the inclusion of everyone in our society, no matter who they love.

Our laws and especially our Criminal Code are tools we can use to protect the most vulnerable and to prevent and remedy injustices. The bill before us is progressive and comprehensive. It bans so-called conversion therapy. It goes without saying that such therapy is not based on science. This harmful and unacceptable practice rooted in homophobia, biphobia and transphobia has no place in our society.

Bill C-6 would add five offences to the Criminal Code: causing a child to undergo conversion therapy; removing a child from Canada with the intention that the child undergo conversion therapy; causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against the person's will; advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy; and receiving a financial benefit from the provision of conversion therapy.

• (1120)

[English]

Before I move to the details of this important bill, I would also like to recognize the incredible advocacy of a member of my community in Outremont. Dr. Kimberley Manning is an associate professor of political science at Concordia University. She is also a fierce advocate for transgender rights and one of the directing minds behind the website GenderCreativeKids.ca, as well as a not-for-profit organization serving the parents of gender non-conforming children. We owe a debt of gratitude to her and to all parents who have advocated tirelessly for the rights of their children and for minors everywhere.

The bill before us proposes five new Criminal Code offences related to conversion therapy, including, first and foremost, causing a minor to undergo conversion therapy. It would also ban the removal of a minor from Canada to undergo conversion therapy abroad, make it an offence to cause a person to undergo conversion therapy against their will, make it illegal to profit from providing conversion therapy, as well as ban any advertising for conversion therapy and authorize courts to order the seizure of conversion therapy publicity or their removal from the Internet.

[Translation]

Conversion therapy can come in many different forms. It may last an hour, a week, months or years, and it is always incredibly damaging. Conversion therapy is designed to convince a person that they are living a lie and to renounce their homosexual or bisexual orientation, or gender identity, in the case of a trans or non-binary person.

I want to talk about the extent and impact of this practice. The statistics speak volumes. In February 2020, the Community-Based Research Centre, a Vancouver organization dedicated to LGBTQ+ men's health released interim findings of its Sex Now Survey. The findings of this survey of 7,200 people show the extent of this practice in 2020.

Government Orders

In Canada, nearly 20% of sexual minority men report having every experienced sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression change efforts. Of them, nearly 40% have experienced conversion therapy in Canada. Younger men, and two-spirit, trans and non-binary respondents are more likely to be targeted by coercion.

These therapies have many repercussions. Undergoing conversion therapy is associated with various psychosocial outcomes such as depression, anxiety, social isolation and delay in coming out. These are serious impacts.

A person who has undergone conversion therapy, especially a young person, will have experienced trauma and will live with the consequences their entire life, at the expense of their mental health. That person will feel that they are not authentic, that they should be ashamed of their identity, that they must live a lie or even that they do not deserve to live.

Many adults who survived this injustice in their youth have described how they are still unable to establish a relationship of trust with their family, peers and colleagues. In some cases, they even find it difficult to pursue their studies or get a job. They often say that they even find it difficult to have a healthy intimate relationship or live their gender identity to the fullest.

Even worse, we know that these practices can lead our children, brothers, sisters, friends and colleagues in the LGBTQ+ community to have suicidal ideation and even act on it. How can we tolerate this in Canada in 2020?

• (1125)

[English]

The practice of conversion therapy, indeed, cannot be tolerated. On the one hand, it causes such psychological trauma as to lead individuals, statistically, to much higher rates of depression and suicide. On the other hand, the underlying rationale for conversion therapy runs antithetical to our values as a country: our values of freedom and liberty, the premise that every Canadian should be free to love whomever they choose and to express their individuality however they choose. This is yet one more step in our visceral drive as human beings to express ourselves and our most fundamental identity the way that we decide.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member: Conversion therapy is an abuse of the most epic proportions, it is an abrogation of human rights and this bill should proceed.

I also think it is incumbent upon the government to move on an issue that it has had five years to move on, and that is ending the discriminatory blood ban. Can the member opposite please update the House on when she expects my gay friends to be able to donate blood?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I am so pleased that Bill C-6 has the support of many Conservative members. I hope it will have the unanimous support of this House. It is incredibly important, as I have outlined in my speech, that we ban conversion therapy in this country. It is a barbaric practice that has no good in it.

With respect to my colleague's question regarding a blood ban, we have committed as a government to move forward on this and I look forward to working with her and other members in this House on a future bill.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the very first debates I remember being involved in was on the right to same-sex marriage. I received a call from my parish priest to say that if I did not change my vote, I would be excommunicated from the church. My wife was not allowed to participate in a graduation ceremony because of my vote, my daughter, in grade 2, was not allowed to make her First Communion. The diocese sent out a press release asking to have me defeated in the next election. I also remember the incredible support of Catholics and other religious people across the north, particularly in the Franco-Ontarian community where they remembered the Duplessis priests and being told from the pulpit how to vote.

That lesson taught me that Canadians are much more open, giving and caring than some of the religious leaders who have let us down in the past. However, religious communities are also struggling and trying to find ways of being positive. The bill before is a very important sign, and I think we should try to get as much support for it as possible.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more with my colleague. I also believe that this bill and the idea of banning conversion therapy has widespread support in Canada among many different communities.

I look forward to the member's support and the support of all members in this House for Bill C-6.

• (1130)

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently, not only to this member but to some of the other speeches from Liberal members. I hear over and over again the same words about what the bill would do.

One of the most impassioned speeches I have heard in the House in my short time here was yesterday from the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, who clearly is supportive of the bill but is encouraging the government to look at an amendment that would add greater clarity around what is not prohibited. I would like to ask the member whether she is supportive of looking at that amendment.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I agree that we need to work collaboratively as members in this House. I believe that we will have an opportunity in committee to look at proposed amendments and ensure that ideas such as the one that the Conservative member is proposing can be discussed, debated and perhaps included in this bill. It is certainly our intention to be as open and collaborative as possible.

Government Orders

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked a lot about treatment, services and procedures, and I am wondering whether she could clarify what she means. I think we all agree in the House that barbaric, degrading, dehumanizing, coerced and unwanted treatments should be prohibited, but can she clarify a little more on what she believes would be acceptable?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I believe the previous colleague also raised this point.

Perhaps there is some concern in this House around conversations. The Minister of Justice has clarified that conversations between individuals and their religious leaders, or individuals and their counsellors or psychologists are not included in this bill and are absolutely permitted under what is being proposed by the government. I think we need to keep that in mind as we move forward.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker,

“You know, nothing makes God happier than when two people, any two people, come together in love. Friends, family, we’re gathered here today to join Carol and Susan in holy matrimony.”

Twenty-six years ago now, 14-year-old me watched Ross Geller walk his ex-wife down the aisle to be married to her lesbian partner. At the time, it was quite the thing, one of the first mainstream television portrayals of a non-straight wedding. This episode of *Friends* was censored in parts of the U.S. and was aired nearly 10 years before same-sex marriage was legalized in Canada.

For 40-year-old me to be standing here debating this bill, it makes me ask why, but it is necessary. I cannot believe that we need to debate the bill, yet here we are. Even though our society has made progress in removing barriers to equality of opportunity for the LGBTQ+ community, which I will refer to as “the community” throughout my speech, these Canadians still face significant discrimination and marginalization. The topic of the bill is one facet that reflects and contributes to this marginalization.

Today I want to describe what the bill would do, why it is important and why it should be supported, and clarify confusion on some issues that have arisen around its form and structure.

First, I want to discuss what so-called conversion therapy is. In the words of my dear friend and brother from a different mother, Brian Hearn, “it isn’t therapy, it’s abuse, it’s torture.” Brian is right. It is abuse and it is a violation of basic human rights.

According to the Canadian Psychological Association, conversion therapy refers to “any formal therapeutic attempt to change the sexual orientation of bisexual, gay and lesbian individuals to heterosexual.” This definition has generally been updated to include methods that aim to change the gender identity or gender expression of an individual. This practice is rooted in the false and outdated assumption that homosexuality and other forms of gender and sexual diversity are mental disorders that can be “cured”. This is a position that medical practitioners around the world have rejected for some years.

Many leaders from conversion therapy organizations, sometimes called the ex-gay movement, have since denounced the practice as

clearly harmful and many of their leaders have even come out as LGBTQ+ themselves.

There is no scientific evidence that these practices have medical merit. In fact, it is the opposite. The Canadian Psychiatric Association, for example, has called the practices “pseudoscientific.” While some people’s understanding of their own sexual identity might change over time, there is no evidence that their sexual orientation, who they are sexually attracted to, changed.

The scientific and medical communities have confirmed what every member of the community already knows; that we are born loving who we are, loving who we love and that there is nothing to fix. That is where the bill comes in.

The bill would make illegal, via amendment to the Criminal Code, the following: forcing someone to undergo conversion therapy against his or her will; causing a child to undergo conversion therapy; doing anything to remove a child from Canada with the intent that the child would undergo conversion therapy outside of Canada; advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy; and receiving financial or other material benefit for from provision of conversion therapy.

Some may ask why the bill is necessary. First, there is overwhelming consensus by scientific and medical practitioners and organizations in Canada and around the world that conversion therapy is unequivocally harmful. From one Canadian survey of survivors of conversion therapy, 30% had attempted suicide following their intervention. All survivors who responded experienced harmful psychological effects, “ranging from mild distress to severe anxiety, self-hatred, and suicide attempts.”

The Canadian Psychological Association also notes distress, depression, a feeling of personal failure, difficulty sustaining relationships and sexual dysfunction as consequences of conversion therapy. Many survivors noted that recovering from this trauma was akin to recovering from any other trauma. It took years, to a whole lifetime, to deal with the pain and suffering caused by so-called conversion therapy.

Some so-called conversion therapy advocates, especially those in the United States, have claimed that conversion therapy might have positive effects for a small minority of participants. This is also categorically false.

In 2009, the American Psychological Association said of such so-called research, “nonexperimental studies often find positive effects that do not hold up under the rigor of experimentation.” It is important to note this, because these false beliefs are often held up as a reason for why the bill is not necessary.

For those who think it does not happen in Canada, think again.

Government Orders

● (1135)

Estimates range between 20,000 and 47,000 Canadians having been exposed to this vile practice. With a 30% suicide rate, think of how many Canadians have attempted to take their life because of this torture. On top of this, the systemic marginalization LGBTQ2 Canadians already face in general makes it even worse. They are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness and physical violence.

With respect to mental health, the stigma and discrimination against the community's youth produces what many researchers call minority stress, which leaves LGBTQ2 people at a higher risk of health issues.

For example, youth from the community face 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. They also face double the risk of PTSD than their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts. A 2013 study of trans people in Ontario 15 and older found that 77% had seriously considered suicide before and 43% had attempted suicide. Among the most vulnerable to suicide were trans youth, aged 16 to 24. Importantly, the study found that suicide risk for trans individuals decreased with social, societal and parental support.

We must also discuss the economic marginalization of members of the community. Among 40,000 young Canadians who are homeless each year, studies estimate between 25% and 40% are LGBTQ2. That is between 10,000 and 16,000 homeless people in Canada. One Ontario study also found that half of all trans Ontarians lived on less than \$15,000 a year.

Then there are the overt acts of violence and discrimination against the community. Between 2014 and 2018, hundreds of hate crimes on the basis of sexual orientation were reported to police, constituting 10% of all hate crimes during this period. We do not even know about hate crimes on the basis of gender identity and expression during this period because there was no category for it. As such, we do not even have statistics to describe the extent of violence against trans Canadians, which we know is large, given anecdotal reports. However, other reports paint a troubling picture. A 2011 Egale Canada reported that 74% of trans students faced verbal harassment and 37% experienced physical harassment.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has shown that positive mental health and well-being for members of the community more broadly is associated with family and friend support, supportive work environments, low levels of internalized homophobia and positive responses to coming out, which is why the bill is important.

To put this more bluntly, rejection from parents, family members, religious communities, workplaces and more that members of the community face present a clear and direct threat to their equality and dignity. People end up on the street if their families reject them for being gay or trans. They end up selling their bodies if they are on the streets with no option. They end up facing violence if people hate who they are. All this is to say that banning conversion therapy will not suddenly end homophobia and transphobia in Canada, but it can make things better and it can stop stigma. This bill is a very good step in the right direction.

Now I will clarify some confusion on certain issues with regard to the bill.

Some have expressed concerns that the bill could prevent a trans person from “detransitioning”.

First, this is a phenomenon that rarely happens. A U.S.-based survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that only 0.4% of respondents detransitioned after realizing transitioning was not what they wanted. The rest who reported detransitioning, 7.6% of the 28,000 people surveyed, reported the reason for that as another reason, most often because of pressure from parents.

Second, this argument is predicated on the belief that it is easy to transition. This is patently false and painfully laughable for the many trans Canadians who are in the midst of transition today.

Wait times for gender-affirming interventions are long processes with many required medical steps and interventions. It takes time for assessments, time for referrals and time on the waiting list. The idea that trans persons are able to medically transition without any time to reflect and, as a result, they might be coerced into it is patently bunk, as is the assumption that medical transition can happen without medical supervision.

I also want to be clear that not every trans person wishes to undergo a medical transition. However, for those who do, medical transition can involve multiple courses of actions that are discussed and guided by medical professionals. These include hormone therapy, genital or chest surgeries or other gender confirming surgeries.

● (1140)

If we take the case of genital surgery in Ontario, a person needs two assessments recommending surgery from a doctor, nurse, nurse practitioner, social worker or psychologist and both of these assessments must confirm persistent gender dysphoria, not transitional gender dysphoria. Therefore, it must be clear that this has been happening over a period of time and the person must have taken 12 months of hormone therapy already. This just does not happen overnight or on a lark.

My friend Hannah Hodson, here in Ontario, wanted me to share her experience. She first started speaking to a therapist, then met with many doctors and it took her over a year to first get her first hormone prescription. At the time, she was a 32-year-old adult living in the easiest province in Canada to do it, because Ontario operates on informed consent for adults. That is not the case in many other parts of our country.

The assertion that it is easy for a child to transition in Canada or that medical transition happens without rigorous oversight is also bunk. For children in Canada, they and their parents would first have to start by speaking to a medical professional and likely a gender therapist. For children transitioning, changes are usually 100% social; that is, how they act, how they dress. It is only under the strict oversight of medical professionals that someone could access even reversible interventions like puberty blockers. In terms of gender-affirming surgeries, by way of medical practice standards in Canada, they do not really happen before age 18 anyway.

These assumptions are also rooted in the basis of an overly simplified and scientifically rejected perception of gender as solely relating to sex or genitals. The concept of gender identity is about relating to the world, not just genitalia. Many trans people choose to live without those surgeries and it does not make them any less than who they are. However, for many people, that gender-affirming care is what they need to live as a fully functioning member of society.

Back to my friend Hannah, she said, “I always joke that there is no way I would willingly do this if it wasn’t who I am. I was living as a straight presenting white man, I had won the jackpot.” The decision to transition is not made on a lark because an out trans person still faces enormous challenges even in Canada. Trans people face incredible rates of abuse and harassment. According to a 2011 Egale survey, 74% of trans students report verbal harassment and 37% report physical harassment.

Hannah can maybe now go to 35 countries safely, maybe. In Ontario, even today, people send her threats or call her a freak when she is walking down the street, and she lives in one of the most accepting cities in Canada. If anyone ever does this to Hannah, she should tell them to come talk to me.

Another recent study showed that 45% of trans people in a survey sampled have committed suicide. However, there is hope. With strong family support, that rate drops by 93%. Therefore, to fully refute the notion that somehow the bill hurts trans persons in any way, it is the opposite. It will reduce the stigma they face and stop a form of violence against them.

It has also been suggested that the bill may criminalize private conversations, particularly between a parent and a child or a religious leader and a parishioner. I believe this to be false after reading the bill.

First, uncoerced conversations, including those with minors, are already protected by freedom of expression under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The bill would further protect this right by defining conversion therapy directly in the bill as “a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.”

Upon reading the bill, I believe that the phrasing “designed to” makes it crystal clear that the bill does not criminalize formal conversations between faith leaders or family members. If there are concerns regarding freedom of expression, people should rejoice. The bill would protect the values of freedom of expression, the right to expression of self and truth as it pertains to sexual orienta-

Government Orders

tion and gender identity, which are necessary given all the evidence of discrimination against the community that I have already presented.

It also has been suggested that the bill has the potential to criminalize prayer or religious belief. I also believe this to be a false assertion. Freedom of religious expression is an underpinning of Canada’s pluralism, which I strongly support. There is, however, a clear difference between a religious belief and a sustained effort made by somebody in a coercive setting to change someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity. In the same way, there is a difference between a general prayer and this practice as well. I believe the bill already clearly outlines these differences, for the following reason.

- (1145)

Most members seem to agree that banning conversion therapy is a pressing and substantive objective. Protecting the health and well-being of LGBTQ2 Canadians from clear harm is of urgent concern. As such, this bill is proportional to any potential burdens on, for example, religious freedom claims.

This bill proposes limits that are rationally connected to the goal of protecting LGBTQ2 Canadians, but it does not arbitrarily infringe on religious freedom. It does not, for example, infringe on holding anti-LGBTQ2 beliefs, which I, for the record, do not have, and I do not believe anyone should have. It only prevents them from acting on them. In my view, the spirit and value of religious freedoms is to protect individuals so they may practise their faith. Many existing provisions in our Criminal Code, however, already limit what actions might be taken in the name of that. Religious freedom does not extend to harming others.

To be clear, this does not mean that Bill C-6 somehow infringes on parents’ rights to talk to their children about sex and sexuality. It does not infringe on parents’ rights to hold the belief that homosexuality is wrong, which is, again, a belief I fully reject. It does not infringe on those parents’ rights to express that belief either. It does, as has been stated over and over, prevent any practice, treatment, or service, designed to change someone’s sexuality or gender identity. Bill C-6 draws the line at turning that belief into a practice designed to change fundamentally who someone is, and in so doing, prevents harm to their person.

Banning conversion therapy mitigates one fraction of the violence and marginalization directed at the community, but it does not stop hate crimes, bullying and harassment. Also, it does not fix all of the other issues that I outlined before.

Government Orders

For those who are worried that this could somehow be a slippery slope, I would also point members to the fact that many other jurisdictions and municipalities have also, within the tools available to them within their jurisdictional responsibilities, implemented similar measures. Churches are still operating, as are mosques and gurdwaras. Society is going on, but I feel those types of regulations have sent a message to the LGBTQ2 community that society is working on some of the systemic discriminations I outlined already.

I have spent a lot of time discussing my view as a legislator today, but I would like to take a minute and explain my view on this as a human being, so I will go back to my smart and effervescent friend Hannah. She wanted me to tell the House this on her behalf: “LGBTQ people are who they are. You can’t turn or fix us. There is nothing to fix. But you can choose to love and support us instead.”

That is really what I hope we can do as a country. No amount of legislation can change hearts and minds. Only an individual commitment to compassion, understanding and kindness will do that.

I remember standing on a windy patio in Banff in July 2019. In Alberta, members of Parliament can legally perform wedding ceremonies, and on that day I had the privilege of uniting two beautiful humans in marriage. They were surrounded by loving and excited friends and family members, and there was not a dry eye in the place, including mine, because their love for each other was so infectious we could not help but revel in it. For Spencer and Jeff Seabrook, that day was not about their sexual orientation. It was about a joyous celebration of their love for one another.

That is how I think it should be. In the same way, I have five people who I consider to be my family. The love they give me every day, and I mean every day, is not about the fact they are gay. It is about the fact they are amazing human beings who I deeply love in return. I do not want to fix them because they are already perfect.

Most days, it is more about them trying to improve me. They stood with me in my wedding party when I got married. They even bristled when former Prime Minister Harper tried to give them pointers on how to walk down the wedding runway, although Matt and I must admit he had a point. When two of those amazing people told me they were engaged, we celebrated with joy. I say to Dustin Franks, Miguel Arturo Possamai, Craig Sklenar, Craig Volkerink, Brian Hearn, Matt MacDonald and Garrett Ayers that this one is for them.

This morning Matt texted me and said, “Back when we were born, LGBTQ people were facing accusations that they were converting straight people gay. How ironic is it that 40 years later, you’re giving a speech in the House of Commons to prevent people from violating human rights and forcibly attempt to convert gays the other way. Get it together, people!” He has got a point.

• (1150)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, in which she spent quite a bit of time debunking some of the myths about Bill C-6. I would ask her why, when we proposed unanimous consent for this bill to ban conversion therapy, the members of the Conservative Party yelled nay. Why is it that, as the

health critic, she is unable to explain the very logical arguments she just gave to her colleagues, so we can unanimously pass Bill C-6 in this House and ban conversion therapy once and for all?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I am not sure if my colleague opposite has been here long enough to understand that what we do in this place is debate. Debating is not a bad thing. In fact, she just said that she is looking forward to debating amendments.

My friend Dustin Franks said I should say the following to the first Liberal who stands to ask me a question: “You’ve been in government for five years. Why can’t I give blood? Seriously. The best you could do for me as a gay man is give me a special loonie. Stop tokenizing us and take away the blood ban.”

He is right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I think that is one of the most compelling speeches we have heard on the bill. Hats off to the member.

As the previous speaker said, she debunked a bunch of myths and bogus arguments, such as medical treatment, which the bill does not address, private conversations, which are not in jeopardy, and religious beliefs.

She did a terrific job of explaining that a civilized society is entitled to impose limits on religious beliefs. She gave a wonderful speech. I cannot believe that we are still debating these issues in 2020. She also brilliantly raised the issue of blood donation.

I would like to hear a bit more from her on the urgency of passing the bill. Some of our colleagues in the House have said that they are reluctant to support the bill. I would like my colleague to tell us how we can convince them to vote overwhelmingly or unanimously in favour of the bill.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, again, this is a place where we do something called debate. We are debating now. It is respectful. We are looking at things, which we also do at committee. It is kind of what people pay us to do. I do not think debate is a bad thing.

The member raised the issue of the blood ban. Where is the action on that? It has been five years. Honestly, the fact that we have not ended the blood ban perpetuates the stereotypes that somehow gay blood is dirty, that there is not a better way. It really cheeses me off that I have to stand here and explain this to people. I really would like to see legislation of equal urgency from the Liberals to end the gay blood ban.

• (1155)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member just gave a very compelling speech. I hope all members of the House get to listen to it, because not only is it compelling but it is also very persuasive.

She was talking about her age and her memories going back to when she first experienced a gay marriage on television. Not long ago, it was very frequent that individuals would talk about homosexuality as a lifestyle choice, debunking it and belittling the reality of individuals who were gay or lesbian. We have come a fairly long way in that, and now we are here talking about conversion therapy being wrong, not in a unanimous view, but we are very close to unanimous in terms of it being wrong. There may be some details we need to talk about.

Would the member comment on the issue of body affirming, which seems to be another way being used, particularly in dealing with transgender people, to seek to change them, get them to conform to a particular identity and live happily after, but there is no—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the hon. member the possibility of answering.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I am not quite sure what the member's question was.

I outlined in my speech a great deal of facts about how trans persons are treated and approach their life in Canada. We should be sticking to the opinions of medical professionals and approaching trans persons in Canada with every degree of compassion that they should be afforded to ensure they live with dignity and without barriers to equality of opportunity.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the very personal and erudite speech from the member for Calgary Nose Hill. It follows on the speech of another colleague, the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, which was equally personal and quite well argued.

It is interesting listening to the Liberal members in the House on this issue. They suggest that we should not have debate and we should just pass the bill through Parliament unanimously. It indicates to me their overall approach to Parliament. They think Parliament is a nuisance. It reminds me of the motion they put earlier in the pandemic, which they were trying to jam through the House, where they were proposing to suspend Parliament's review and power over spending and taxation until the end of next year. It is reflective of a general, dismissive attitude to Parliament on the part of Liberal members.

Forcing anyone to change their gender or identity cannot be allowed to stand in a free and democratic society. The member mentioned her friend Hannah and the issue of informed consent in Ontario. Can the member tell us how this legislation would interact with provincial legislation, regulations and practices already in place across the country?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question, and one that committees should look at. I would be very interested in hearing from experts on that issue, which is why, to my colleague's point, debate is important. It makes sure the bill

Government Orders

is fully set out. We are on second reading, which means that a vote in favour of this bill would take it to committee for that type of question.

This bill would greatly help the trans community. As I said in my speech, it would remove barriers to equality and to their dignity. I really think it is a good thing.

I just wanted to say for the member, because my friends from Calgary were texting me, that he is invited to Matt's house for dinner. The member has a bit of a fan club there hoping he will accept the invitation.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé that that was a very inspiring speech. It was a fantastic speech, and I commend my colleague for it.

We are debating and legislating on the issue of conversion therapy today because there is pressure, mainly from small religious groups that keep their followers somewhat in the dark, at a time when the young people we are talking about need the support of their families and loved ones to get through this period of questioning and self-acceptance.

Does my colleague agree that we should put more focus on education to help these groups evolve in their way of thinking, join the 21st century and, perhaps, be more welcoming and accepting?

I would like to hear what my colleague thinks about that.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I laid out in my speech why I do not think this bill impinges on religious freedom or the right to individual conversations.

I would just say this: We do have religious freedom in Canada. Just because I do not like what somebody believes does not mean that I have the ability as a legislator to legislate that thought away. It is my responsibility as a human being to change hearts and minds in my actions and how I live. I personally believe that God is love and there is no force in the universe that would tell somebody they are imperfect because of whom they love. That is my deep and personal conviction and belief, and I would not associate with an organization that believed otherwise.

I fundamentally think this is about choice. As I said in my speech, each of our individual actions and responsibilities are to live what we believe, live for good, treat others with dignity and compassion, work to remove the barriers they face to equality of opportunity, and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages.

Government Orders

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise to speak in favour of Bill C-6. This bill represents an important step forward toward building a more supportive and inclusive Canada for all, specifically for the LGBTQ2 community.

Debate on this legislation has been very respectful and quite different from what we would have heard only a few years ago. I am heartened to hear most MPs stand up and say uncategorically that conversion therapy on minors is abhorrent and must be stopped.

We have heard stories about how damaging conversion therapy can be on young people who are struggling with their sexuality. However, it is important to remember that it is not just the person undergoing conversion therapy who is impacted by this form of torture, which I truly believe is torture. Family members and friends are impacted as well.

Many truly believe that if this therapy is available and advertised, it must be acceptable, but it is anything but. I realize this legislation falls short of a total ban on conversion therapy, but it is a start. The measures contained in this bill are the most progressive and comprehensive legislative response to conversion therapy in the world.

Some members of the official opposition are worried that the bill lacks clarity. They claim the passage of this bill risks criminalizing conversations between young Canadians discovering who they are and the individuals they may seek out for advice, such as parents, teachers, faith leaders and coaches. However, the language is quite clear. Nothing in this bill criminalizes these types of conversations. What this criminalizes is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition claims he supports: criminalizing forcing a young person to undergo conversion therapy against their will or removing them from the country to do so. We are criminalizing a discredited and deeply traumatic practice. We are also ensuring that individuals profiting off of conversion therapy or the advertisements to provide it can no longer do so.

Under this legislation, the following definition of conversion therapy is provided:

conversion therapy means a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour. For greater certainty, this definition does not include a practice, treatment or service that relates

(a) to a person's gender transition; or

(b) to a person's exploration of their identity or to its development.

In other words, these amendments would not criminalize those who provide affirming support to persons struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity, such as friends, family members, teachers, social workers, religious leaders and so on; nor would the amendment criminalize private conversations between consenting adults.

I have another definition for my colleagues. "Therapy", according to Merriam-Webster, is the "medical treatment of impairment, injury, disease or disorder". It means to fix or to heal something that is impaired, disordered or broken.

Conversion therapy assumes something is wrong with LGBTQ2 Canadians. Let us take note that the Canadian Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders in 1982. Telling young people they are abnormal and need to be fixed, or trying to fix them, is the problem and why this bill is necessary.

I encourage all members, in their deliberations on this bill, to read first-hand accounts of what the survivors of conversion therapy go through. In Garrard Conley's memoir, *Boy Erased*, inspiration for a film of the same name, he writes about his experiences surviving in a conversion therapy camp. The sort of counselling they offered was to tell him, "Your thoughts are harmful to God. They're disgusting, unnatural. An abomination." They are an abomination. I say that word again because it is not a descriptor that should be used for anyone. Can members imagine how traumatizing it would be for anyone, let alone people in a vulnerable state who are looking for love and support, to be told they are unnatural? That is not therapy. It is torture.

Canada is an accepting country, and we have come a long way in the 50 years since homosexuality was decriminalized, in the 38 years since it stopped being seen as a mental disorder and even in the 15 years since same-sex marriage was legalized. However, we still have so much further to go.

• (1205)

I represent the riding of London West, and our city has had its own history of denying the LGBTQ2 community its voice. In 1995, organizers of the gay pride march asked the mayor of the day to issue a city proclamation in support of the pride march. She refused. The decision led to a three-year legal battle that ended with the Ontario Human Rights Commission fining the mayor and the city \$10,000. It ordered the city to make the proclamation.

Today, the gay pride parade is one of the best celebrations in London, bringing together people of all ages, ethnic origins and sexual orientations. It was one of the big disappointments this year that as a result of the pandemic, we could not have the usual parade. We can only hope that next year's pride parade will be able to move ahead as usual, because we need to remind the community how important it is to have a voice and for young people to know they are not alone.

We do not have to go too far back in our own history in this chamber to remember how far we have come. As we know, section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the equality rights, protects sexuality and sexual orientation from discrimination. However, we must remind ourselves that sexuality was not explicitly stated in the original document. The joint committee of Parliament established to review the charter rejected explicitly including sexuality by a vote of 15 to two. The committee heard from organizations representing LGBT Canadians as to why they thought sexuality should be included in the charter. The meeting was held just down the hall from this chamber, and the questions hon. members asked at that time make for discouraging reading.

I will share them with my colleagues, because I want to demonstrate how dated some of the language and arguments around this issue were. One member actually stormed out of the proceedings after denouncing the gay and lesbian witnesses for peddling what he called an unacceptable lifestyle and one that would corrupt children. Another member shared this view and told LGBT Canadians that they really should not complain about the persecution he acknowledged they experienced. To him, they deserved it.

Thankfully, these abhorrent comments are in the minority, and I know that Canadians recognize the need to value and love everyone, even those who are different from us. Thankfully, today, we can see that Canada has openly LGBTQ2 legislators, mayors, actors, musicians and athletes. Their mere presence shakes the barriers that the community continues to face and slowly and surely helps bring them down. Their voices help us realize how we have failed them in the past and where we must do better.

We know that despite the recognition of equality under the law, the out and proud role models and, most importantly, the growing support of LGBTQ2 Canadians, fear of being different remains. That fear is not unfounded. Unconscious biases still exist, as do attitudes that are not accepting and supportive. Some avoid coming out because they believe it may negatively affect their careers or wonder how their friends and family might view them. Some who have come out deal with the trauma of being rejected by friends, families and communities. Far too many LGBTQ2 youth, from Nova Scotia to London to Alberta to British Columbia, still do not find the love and support they need. It is heartbreaking to know that around 40,000 young Canadians are homeless right now. Up to 40% of them are homeless because of their LGBTQ2 identity. It is hard to come out, and it can be hard for a person to have someone they love come out to them.

Organizations like PFLAG London in my community are there to help individuals who come out and help their families and friends as well. There are countless other organizations, including many religious ones, that help persons who struggle with issues of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. These real supports will not be negatively impacted by this law. Supports that treat people with respect, love and dignity are very small asks. This is how all human beings should be treated. It is how we can have those difficult conversations with the ones we love.

Conversion therapy assumes that something is broken and needs to be fixed, but it has not fit the definition of therapy in Canada for almost 40 years. This bill is long overdue, and I am proud to sup-

port it because it is another step in the right direction. We cannot continue to pretend that the abusive, sickening practice of conversion therapy is okay in any way, shape or form for our communities.

• (1210)

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few months ago, I met with various clergy from different denominations. When we brought up Bill C-6, I thought they were going to say that through prayer they could actually change someone, but that was far from the truth. They were very concerned that, by having a conversation with someone who is gay, lesbian or transgender, they could be persecuted or prosecuted for a crime. They were concerned that if they spoke to them, they would be criminalized.

The member said this was false. Could she please explain how they came to the conclusion that they would be charged in some form or sent to prison? Why do they have this rationale? Could the member change it and explain to them why this is not the case?

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Speaker, we know that conversations of this type are difficult, but they must happen. To say that we cannot have conversations would be unrealistic. We must allow for conversation to take place to make sure that young people know they are loved and are part of their community.

This bill would not in any way make it a crime to have those conversations. That is the first step, and it is important and will continue to be important.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

We know that the Quebec National Assembly is also debating a bill on conversion therapy. It is great to see the two parliaments working together.

MNAs in Quebec City are also wondering whether individuals who are under the control of religious organizations that consider homosexuality to be a mortal sin could decide to challenge the Quebec law in court on the grounds of freedom of conscience and religion. That is something that is being discussed in Quebec City.

I am wondering whether the federal government had any such discussions. It is certainly important to start by passing the bill. However, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. These preliminary discussions about possible court challenges to the federal law would help us prepare to deal with that eventuality.

Government Orders

• (1215)

[English]

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Speaker, this is a step in the right direction. There is no question that religious freedom is a part of what we believe in this country and that will not change.

We know that there could be some more discussion, right up to the Supreme Court, on these issues, which is entirely part of the process. It behooves us to move forward and make sure that we get this right.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I agree with her 100% and could not have put it better myself. She is absolutely right: this bill is a step in the right direction, one I think we should have taken long ago.

Her description of conversion therapy as abhorrent, disgusting, abusive, and even dangerous resonated with me. If conversion therapy is all of those things, why does the Liberal government's bill not seek to ban it outright?

[English]

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I wish the bill went further. I agree that we need to move forward on this so that conversion therapy is outlawed completely. However, we know that in this country we want to make sure to bring everybody onside and that we do this step by step. This is our first step toward that.

I hope that eventually we will be voting on a bill that will completely criminalize conversion therapy in Canada.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, I wish to inform the House that there have been more than five hours of debate on this motion during this first round. Consequently, the maximum time allocated for all subsequent interventions shall be 10 minutes for speeches and five minutes for questions and comments.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code to ban conversion therapy, a truly horrific practice. Bill C-6 specifically criminalizes transporting a minor out of Canada for the purpose of conversion therapy, subjecting adults to conversion therapy against their will and the “business of conversion therapy”: charging for, profiting from or advertising conversion therapy for both minors and adults.

We must be clear. Homophobia and transphobia kill. They are a side of the fascist and hateful coin that demonizes and attacks us all. As parliamentarians we must be clear: There is nothing wrong, or that requires fixing, with anyone in the LGBTQ2IA communities. Conversion therapy is a horrific practice that should never have happened. The fact that it did, has and does is shameful. Our families, doctors and communities should be sources of comfort and respite for everyone, not harm.

The first responsibility of members of Parliament is to stand up for the rights and dignity of their constituents. The bill is an opportunity to show that. It is an opportunity to say no to homophobia and transphobia, because homophobia and transphobia kill. Let us send a clear message to the bullies, the bigots and those who would harm the LGBTQ2IA communities that their harmful behaviour, their hate and demonization are unacceptable and unwanted. Let our voice of love drown out the hate. We must speak out against homophobic and transphobic jokes, because they are not jokes. It is hate. Every one of those hateful jokes does the same type of damage we are talking about here. It comes from the same type of hate we are trying to stamp out. If we see it, we must say something. We must make it clear which side we stand on.

The phrase “conversion therapy” does not really reflect the horror of the practice, so let us be clear about what we are talking about: electroshock therapy, forced vomiting, forced ingestion of psychotropic drugs such as ketamine, and exorcisms and beatings. Simply put, it is abuse. Trying to force people to be something they are not will never work. We should not try, because there is nothing wrong with who they are.

A recent study showed that roughly 20% of gay, bi or two-spirited men experienced some form of conversion therapy. Another said that 42% of survivors age 13-24 attempt suicide. Homophobia and transphobia kill. It is no surprise when people are told that they are lesser and they do not matter, when they are told they need “fixing.” To anyone listening who needs to hear it, let me be clear. They do not need fixing. They are fine just the way they are. It is the folks attacking them who need fixing, not them. It may not feel like it, but many people believe in them, want them to succeed and cannot wait to meet them.

This hateful message often comes from those closest to us: parents, neighbours and in some cases even elected officials. It is truly unacceptable. We must put an end to it. We must put an end to homophobia and transphobia because they kill. It is impossible to change someone's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression through conversion therapy, nor would it be desirable even if it worked. All we would be doing is contributing to further harm, sometimes leading to depression and social isolation and often to self-harm or death by suicide. This is true of traditional conversion therapy and so-called body affirming therapy. We must ban conversion therapy. We must say no to homophobia and transphobia because they kill.

As we get to this moment, I would like to recognize the work of those who got us here. In so many of these struggles, we do not always get to bear witness to the hard work of community members and survivors who lay the groundwork. I want to recognize the LGBTQ2IA advocacy groups, labour unions, members of the medical community and the movement builders. I think of trailblazers across the country like my friend, Cheri DiNovo; my colleague, the MP for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke; trailblazers like Svend Robinson and Bill Siksay, former members of Parliament for the NDP; and my provincial colleagues, like Janis Irwin, who speak out and have spoken out against homophobia and transphobia at any chance they had.

● (1220)

I think of every survivor who has shared their story, every person who has spoken out and every community member who has endured, and I think of those who did not. Not one more person should be murdered by homophobia or transphobia. We owe it to those who are not here to make sure it never happens again.

I am happy to see some really inspiring and amazing work happening at the municipal, provincial and territorial levels across the country to protect queer youth. No provincial health plans allow for conversion therapy as part of the public health care insurance system. No reputable health care provider should perform the practice, yet we know that it happens. That is why this legislation is so critical.

Only my home province of Manitoba has a formal and complete ban on health professionals offering conversion therapy. It was the first province to ban the practice. Today, nearly 80 per cent of Alberta is covered by conversion therapy bans, but the provincial government refuses to act. Its lack of leadership puts children in danger.

Ontario, Nova Scotia and P.E.I. have made it illegal for health professionals to practise conversion therapy on minors. Yukon Territory is moving forward with legislation to ban conversion therapy as well.

However, there has been a lack of federal leadership until this point. In 2019, my former colleague Sheri Benson brought forward a petition by the Lethbridge Public Interest Research Group, signed by survivors and allies, calling on the government to ban the practice. They shared their stories and their collective voice called on us as parliamentarians to stand with them.

At the time, the Liberal government used the tired argument of obstructionists to human dignity everywhere: state rights. After countless survivors and activists continued to raise their voices, the government relented. The government was wrong then, but I am glad it is moving now, because homophobia and transphobia kill.

Let us be clear on the Liberals' pink-washed record on LGBTQ rights more broadly. A government that believes in queer rights does not prop up the Saudi Arabian government: one of the worst abusers of LGBTQ rights in the world. It does not continuously deny the right of men who have sex with men to give blood, despite saying otherwise.

Government Orders

In 2020, being an ally must mean more than doing the bare minimum. It must mean more than attending Pride parades. It must mean giving communities the tools to live in dignity and in health, and to lead their own fights in their own way.

New Democrats support this legislation, but we believe it must go further. We must make sure we are not leaving trans people behind. We must make sure that when we talk about banning conversion therapy for sexual orientation, we also include the same harmful practice when it comes to gender identity and expression because, and it bears repeating, homophobia and transphobia kill.

We know that legislation alone is not going to keep LGBTQ2IA people safe, nor will it repair the damage brought. The government must ensure that adequate funding exists for community-led solutions. It is the only way. Whether it is speaking out against hate or against practices that are harmful to the LGBTQ2IA communities in Canada, or in Canada's foreign policy, we must be clear on our values of love and respect, and condemn the bullies and bigots.

When I was writing my speech, I read stories of survivors of conversion therapy. Many were living through their pain, and their voices must be heard. I want to share a few of those stories.

Conversion therapy is not therapy. It is just torture, abuse, and people still need to be educated.

These are the words of a survivor who was forced to take a cocktail of psychedelic drugs and told to smell his feces any time he felt attracted to another man. His story helped convince the City of Vancouver to ban the practice. There are other horrific stories, but out of these stories we know change has already taken place. Folks in the LGBTQ community deserve more. Their human rights matter, like everyone else's.

Today, let us support Bill C-6, but let us go further in ensuring respect and realization of rights for LGBTQ people across our country and around the world.

● (1225)

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate those comments. I just have a question.

Government Orders

I feel like we are not answering some of the concerns that other groups have. I am getting emails, not from religious groups but from feminist organizations and LGBT individuals. One email I got from We the Females, a feminist group, is concerned that among young girls gender dysphoria is being overdiagnosed. Young girls who may be confused about their general sense of self or who believe their current personal distress has a simple cause, being the wrong gender, are being overdiagnosed, put on drugs and put on a process that is irreversible.

Does the member have a comment for the people who are concerned about this? This is not related to animosity towards LGBTQ people, but just a concern for kids.

Could the member address this concern?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member who asked the question has a record of supporting deeply troubling and discriminatory views. We saw that in his leadership campaign. What I would say is that when it comes to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Derek Sloan: Mr. Speaker, those comments have nothing to do with this debate. They are personal attacks that have been taken out of context and are in fact false. I would prefer that we return to the debate—

• (1230)

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member's point of order. In this case, I did not hear anything in the comment by the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski that would necessarily categorize it in the same way that the hon. member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington has. I will keep an ear open for that. In this case, what the member is speaking of constitutes debate on the question before the House. Perhaps he will have another opportunity in the course of this debate to comment on those issues.

The hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski can complete her response.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, frankly, I am flabbergasted at the member's comment. If he is not able to take the heat for what we all know is a very troubling track record, then I am not quite sure what he is doing here.

I have real concern with mischaracterizing organizations as feminist. I am very concerned to hear the kind of framing that the member is using, frankly, to fit his own agenda: an agenda that we know has been of hate and discrimination.

Let me be clear. Trans rights are human rights. The rights of the LGBTQ2IA community are human rights. As members of Parliament in a country like Canada, which commits to upholding human rights, we should be standing up for them. Supporting Bill C-6 is squarely part of that, and we must go a lot further.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated my colleague's speech. Like her, I agree with the bill we are debating today.

I recently watched the TV series *Ratched*, which is set in a psychiatric hospital in the 1950s. In the series, they treat homosexuality with a lobotomy. It really drives the point home that this was happening in the 1950s.

I am shocked to see that in this day and age, gay and trans individuals are still not fully accepted and face a great deal of intolerance. I am very aware of the suicide rate among gay people.

In 2020, this bill is progressive and brings us into the 21st century. What should we do today to make trans and gay individuals feel more accepted? As legislators, what can we do to advance Canadian society even further?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I appreciate what he said about the history of our country. We must learn from history so that the abuse suffered by gay and trans individuals is not repeated.

In my speech, I mentioned several actions that the federal government should take to recognize the rights of members of the LGBTQ+ community here in Canada. We must also ensure federal funding is distributed to support the work being done every day by LGBTQ+ organizations on the ground, in support of marginalized members of their community.

As I said, it is not enough to do this work here at home. For example, we must also implement an international policy that upholds the rights of members of LGBTQ+ communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member, 100%, that sexual orientation and gender identity, SOGI, rights are human rights; and we need to go further as parliamentarians to protect people from homophobia and from horrible practices like the practice of conversion therapy, which is not a therapy it is torture.

In going further, would the member like to see a complete ban? The legislation says that adults going through conversion therapy against their will is banned, but would the member like to see a complete ban of this so-called therapy?

• (1235)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, Mr. Speaker, absolutely a complete ban is important. It is very important for us to support the bill but to state very clearly that it must go further. Let us not lose the opportunity that we have right now to do the right thing. Already, the Liberals have waited way too long. I certainly would encourage jurisdictions across the country to continue to do the work they are doing to implement complete bans at their levels of government, but we can be leaders right now and set the bar right now; a complete ban is critical.

As I said, we need to be ensuring that we are standing up for the human rights of the LGBTQ2IA communities here at home and in our foreign policy as well. That is something where we need to see much more leadership from the Liberal government, now and going forward.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join second reading debate on Bill C-6, which proposes to criminalize conduct pertaining to conversion therapy, a cruel exercise that stigmatizes and discriminates against Canada's LGBTQ2+ communities.

Bill C-6 proposes the same amendments as a previous bill, Bill C-8. We are committed to ending conversion therapy in Canada and we continue to advocate for that. Conversion therapy is a destructive and discriminatory practice that serves to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, the fundamental part of who they are.

Relevant evidence shows individuals have experienced a range of harms. Children are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of conversion therapies and transgender, indigenous, racial minority and lower-income individuals are disproportionately exposed. This bill promotes the equality rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirited Canadians by targeting the conduct of the hazardous practices that sends a message that they can and should change who they are, which is wrong.

Canadians value diversity, equality and human dignity. This bill reflects and reiterates those fundamental values. We must move ahead and eradicate this discriminatory practice that is out of step with Canadian values. Many studies have catalogued the harms experienced by people who have been subjected to conversion therapy. In 2009, the American Psychological Association noted that conversion therapy originated in a time when homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic and statistical manual.

More recent research shows a wider variety of interventions, including gender role reconditioning, support groups and psychotherapy, as well wide varieties of providers, including both licensed and unlicensed mental health providers in various disciplines, pastoral counsellors and laypersons. Not surprisingly, the science shows that conversion therapy is incapable of achieving this discriminatory end. A person can no more change their sexual orientation or gender identity than they can their ethnicity or other characteristics that define who they are.

As with any bias against individuals based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, it negatively affects mental health and causes a wide range of serious harms, including decreased self-esteem and authenticity to others, increased self-hatred, confusion, depression, guilt, hopelessness, helplessness, shame, social withdrawal, suicidal ideation, increased substance abuse, feeling of being dehumanized and untrue to self, loss of faith and sexual dysfunction.

Conversion therapy has also been discredited and denounced by many professional associations as a harmful practice, particularly to children. For example, in 2014, the Canadian Psychiatric Association expressed its opposition to the use of conversion therapy, stating that the practice assumes LGBTQ2+ identities “indicate a men-

tal disorder” and that LGBTQ2+ people “could or should change their sexual orientation [or] gender identity”.

The Canadian Paediatric Society has also indicated the practice is clearly unethical and the Canadian Psychological Association, in its policy statement on conversion therapy, opposes the practice and takes note of the fact that scientific research does not support its efficacy. I would like to emphasize that conversion therapy is a very harmful practice to our children, and it is our duty to protect them against such harmful practices.

To be clear, the evidence tells us the persons exposed to conversion therapy have experienced its harmful impacts regardless of whether they were compelled to undergo the practices or sought it out themselves.

• (1240)

Both groups experienced the very same harms, because conversion therapy is aimed at changing a person and not exploring the harmful impacts of stigma and stereotype on a person's self-conduct, which is the foundation for legitimate interventions. Conversion therapy can take many forms, including counselling, behavioural modification and thought therapy and may be offered by professionals, religious officials or laypersons.

Bill C-6 defines conversion therapy as “...a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.” To be clear, this definition does not capture practices, treatments or services designed for other purposes, such as those aimed at supporting individuals without trying to change them. Furthermore, the legislation clarifies that gender-affirming therapies and treatments are not captured by the definition.

Conversion therapy is predicated on lies and falsehood, such that being homosexual, lesbian, bisexual or trans is somehow wrong and needs fixing. Not only is this belief false, it signals a demeaning and degrading message, which undermines the dignity of individuals and the entire LGBTQ community. In contrast to what others may say, there is no right or wrong when it comes to who one is or who one loves. As mentioned earlier, conversion therapy has been discredited and denounced by professionals and health care associations in Canada, the United States and all around the world. It has no scientific basis or grounding in health care practices.

Government Orders

Government Orders

Bill C-6 proposes to create five new Criminal Code offences targeting conversion therapy. These proposed offences would prohibit: first, causing a minor to undergo conversion therapy; second, removing a minor from Canada to undergo conversion therapy abroad; third, causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against their will; fourth, profiting from providing conversion therapy; and fifth, advertising the provision of conversion therapy. If passed, this bill would make Canada's laws on conversion therapy the most progressive and comprehensive in the world.

Victor Madrigal-Borloz, the UN independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity, has said that this bill could provide a new international model for dealing with such practices and that this type of more encompassing disposition is probably the very best when it comes to the practices that he has seen around the world.

I implore my colleagues across all party lines today to ensure that we are clear: There is a clear difference between asking someone who they are and telling someone that who they are is wrong and needs fixing.

Supportive teachers, school counsellors, pastoral counsellors, faith leaders, doctors, mental health professionals, friends and family members do not need to fear engaging in the important discussion about someone's identity. These discussions are often critical to personal development. However, what is being targeted here are those who are actively working and providing services designed to change someone's identity based on preconceived notions of who someone ought to be or how someone ought to behave. This bill represents important progress toward ending conversion therapy in Canada and reflects a harmony between progressive policy and constitutional consideration. We must stand together in support to curtail this unscientific and dangerous practice.

In closing, Canada is a country where everyone, regardless of their gender, their gender identity or their sexual orientation can live in equality and freedom. As parliamentarians, this is exactly the legacy we should leave for all of our children, grandchildren and so on. I sincerely hope that all parliamentarians will support this important piece of legislation.

• (1245)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member and I worked together at the mental health caucus for two Parliaments and have done a lot of good work there. He just spent the last 10 minutes explaining how important this piece of legislation is, but in the last four years the government has failed to act. It was actually the municipalities that encouraged the government to finally take action on this file.

I am curious to hear his thoughts as to why it took him and his government so long, essentially kicking and screaming, to get to this point and finally bring the legislation forward.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour to work with the member on the all-parliamentary health caucus. We have effectively worked on that caucus together for at least the last two years to make sure that the impact of mental health on many vulnerable individuals, especially men, in our community is addressed. It is a passion that is shared by both of us.

To respond as to why this has taken so long, the bill was introduced earlier this year. Unfortunately, due to the Speech from the Throne, we were not in a position to debate it fully. Now the bill is in front of us and we are looking forward to debating it and sending it to committee. We are looking forward to having the support of all parties in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed my hon. colleague's speech.

I found one aspect somewhat intriguing. Everyone agrees that we need to pass this bill quickly. Some people who have experienced trauma are waiting for us to pass it. However, there are several other pressing issues, including medical assistance in dying. Some of these bills could have been passed a month ago, but the government decided to prorogue the House for five weeks.

Would my colleague agree that we could have used those five weeks to move some of this legislation forward? People are waiting for us legislators to move things forward.

[*English*]

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Speaker, that is an important question. It is fair to acknowledge that we are living in very difficult times. COVID-19 has left an impact on not only Canadians but across the world. That is the reason we had to take a pause and really reflect on what we had learned since March or early February, when we became aware of this pandemic. We did that and we did it effectively.

We came back with a very strong Speech from the Throne that talked about mental health. We also now have the opportunity to reintroduce bills such as Bill C-6 and Bill C-7.

• (1250)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we see in terms of what is happening on the ground right now, particularly with trans youth, is marginalization and high levels of violence.

I have heard from some of the Conservatives this continual message that this legislation, which bans the specific act of conversion therapy, will somehow interfere with families being able to talk about these issues and will criminalize professionals who are brought in to work with them. I think it is pretty clear, if one looks at the issue of transgender actions, that there is an entire process of consultation and preparation. The idea that this is going to be criminalized, which some members of the Conservative Party have been trying to say, is creating unnecessary fear.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about this.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Speaker, my thanks to my colleague for that clarification. As I stated in my speech as well, there is a clear difference between trying to convert someone against their wishes and consulting someone or providing information.

Government Orders

Therapists, school counsellors, various professionals and parents do not have to worry about engaging in a conversation that explores and guides, because this is not being criminalized. It is actually strongly supported because it is a fundamental process that one has to go through to become comfortable with one's own gender or identity, if one needs to do so.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code, in relation to conversion therapy.

It is my belief that harmful conversion therapy practices are wrong and have no place in Canadian society. No person should be forced or coerced to change their sexual orientation or their gender identity. As we consider this legislation, it is incumbent upon us to examine the actual text of Bill C-6. We must review what is in it or, in this case, what is not in the legislation, because at the end of the day laws will be interpreted and applied based on their written text and not on an expressed intent. It is for that reason that I have serious reservations about the bill.

The legislation lacks a clear definition of conversion therapy. Its definition is so general that it leaves room to be applied broadly. There is very reasonable concern that the legislation could criminalize voluntary conversations and efforts to seek support. It also leaves the door open to infringe on religious expression and parental rights.

As we know, the bill has been reintroduced after it was cleared from the legislative table when the Liberal government unnecessarily prorogued Parliament. It was originally introduced in the first session of this Parliament as Bill C-8. Concerns about the broad definition were raised with the original introduction of the bill. With the clearing of the legislative slate, the Liberal justice minister had the opportunity to fix the definition. It is disheartening that this legislation was reintroduced without addressing these serious concerns.

The justice minister was fully aware of these concerns and made the decision to ignore them. In fact, after the first introduction of the legislation, the Department of Justice put the following disclaimer on its website. It read:

These new offences would not criminalise private conversations in which personal views on sexual orientation, sexual feelings or gender identity are expressed such as where teachers, school counsellors, pastoral counsellors, faith leaders, doctors, mental health professionals, friends or family members who provide support to persons struggling with their sexual orientation, sexual feelings, or gender identity.

That statement would not have been offered if there were no need for it. By providing that clarification, there is an implied acknowledgement that the legislation is not clear. Unfortunately, a disclaimer on the department's website is not the same as legislation. That statement takes a position that is not explicitly stated in the bill before us.

There is nothing in Bill C-6 that clearly states that private conversations in which a person expresses their views on sexual orientation, sexual feelings or gender identity would not be criminalized. When a person is struggling or wrestling with life's issues, regardless of what that might be, it is very common to voluntarily turn to a trusted person for support. In fact, we would probably all encourage a person to reach out for help and not go through it and struggle

alone. For each person, a trusted person is different. It could be a counsellor, a faith leader, a parent, a teacher, a friend or any person with whom they may feel comfortable.

To have the space for open, honest and real conversation, there cannot be a cloud of legal uncertainty around that conversation. There should not be fear of repercussions for expressing a certain viewpoint, offering counsel or even just having an informal conversation. That does not serve the individual seeking support or the individual offering it. There must be freedom to openly talk to those whom we trust. We must be cautious not to undermine support networks.

In introducing this legislation, the Liberal government has spoken about protecting LGBTQ rights, and it is so important that their rights are protected. I would agree that we should stand up to protect those who have been degraded or dehumanized by harmful conversion therapy practices. That is why, as legislators, we should be committed to getting this bill right and, in that effort, we also have the responsibility to be mindful of the rights of all Canadians.

● (1255)

Without a clear definition, it leaves room for the infringement of other held rights. Parental rights in the guidance of children must be part of this debate, just as freedom of religion and freedom of belief are also a part of this debate. Parents not only have the right but the responsibility of raising their children. That responsibility includes providing food, shelter and clothing for them.

However, parenting goes well beyond providing material needs for a child. Parental guidance is key to a child's development. Moms, dads and guardians help protect the physical and psychological well-being of a child. They also help a child understand and unpack the world around them. We often hear parents of infants and toddlers talk about reliving the world through their child's eyes. A child learns about the world around them and a parent is there to help guide and navigate them.

As a mom, I know first-hand that kids from a very young age will ask their parents an abundance of questions and sometimes they never stop. It does not matter if it is the most basic of questions or something incredibly thought-provoking. Parents are there to offer response and insight.

It is healthy for parents and their children to have open and honest dialogue, and for parents to help children in their understanding of their own emotions. A loving and open relationship between parents and children helps foster self-worth and self-esteem. It is important for children to feel comfortable in coming to their parents when they have questions, struggles or want to talk through or about their feelings.

Government Orders

In a world where we live more and more of our lives online, where kids are exposed to so many outside influences, where kids can be inundated with oversexualized content from a very young age and have access to so much information, whether it is credible or not, we need to have more real conversations between children and their parents, not fewer.

The other concern with the broad definition of conversion therapy in this legislation is its relationship to religious expression. A code of conduct around ethics, morality and sexuality is common among major religions. These are often strongly held beliefs that are studied, instructed and practised by all persons of faith. Faith groups have expressed their worry about how this legislation will be applied to them. Will they remain free to teach and encourage members of their faith community to practise their faith in accordance with their religious teachings, or will this legislation and its application go well beyond criminalizing involuntary, harmful and discriminatory conversion therapy practices?

As I have said, it is my belief that the practice of involuntary conversion therapy is harmful and should be banned, but we cannot ban or police thought and expression. We cannot infringe on religious freedoms and we must respect parents. In an effort to ban the practice of conversion therapy, we cannot needlessly criminalize normal and healthy conversations.

As it is written in the current legislation, the definition of conversion therapy is overreaching, in my view, and it is flawed. It does not strike the right balance between protecting people of the LGBTQ community, parental rights and freedom of religion. By providing a clear definition of conversion therapy, we can provide needed clarity on the scope and intent of the legislation.

I will personally be supporting the bill at the second reading stage so that it can be sent to committee where amendments can be put forward in good faith to improve and fix the current legislation's shortfalls. It is my sincere hope that the Liberal government will be open to amendments so that we can get this right for all Canadians.

• (1300)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to a number of Conservative presentations and I understand their worry about the potential for criminalizing private conversations between adults and youth, parents and children, teachers and students in this circumstance, as well as ministers or preachers and members of a congregation.

Would members opposite not also agree that some of those conversations can be very difficult? There are teachers who have had inappropriate conversations with youth, and while that situation may not be criminalized, it cannot be entirely inside the scope of this bill or entirely outside of it. It is a grey area that requires study by the committee.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, the member and I sit on HUMA together and have studied a lot together.

Almost every conversation is a difficult conversation. Our society has gone so far beyond even communication. We absolutely need to encourage conversations. I would like to see what I had

read earlier from the justice department's website, specifically protecting parents, teachers and counsellors, added to the legislation. That would be a very simple fix.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises a lot of very important questions, which have been asked by many people in the chamber. We have heard many conflicting reports as to the interpretation of the bill, whether it constitutes individuals having private conversations or whether it prohibits teachers or faith leaders from having conversations and counselling sessions. There have been representations on both sides of the issue.

As she clearly states, the Minister of Justice had foreknowledge that these issues should have been addressed in the bill when it was reintroduced in this session of Parliament. For whatever reason, he chose not to do that, and there needs to be clarity on the issues of the definition and also on the people who are exempted in the bill.

Why does my colleague have confidence in the Liberal government to make these necessary adjustments in committee?

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, I do not have faith. I have voted against. I do not have confidence in the government, and I am on record for that.

However, if this is truly a team Canada approach and we truly care about the lives of people, we will ensure that this is correct and right so the courts will not throw it out when it comes to that to me. We need to do our due diligence. The Liberals need to work with opposition members even if they do not hold the same views as them. We need to listen to one another intently and actually work together.

• (1305)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to ask a question on the bill. I fully want to state that I fully believe that harmful conversion therapy should be banned and it should be banned through proper legislation.

The member for Battlefords—Lloydminster mentioned that Bill C-6 was lacking in definition. I relate that to much of the legislation we have had from the government since it first came into power in 2015. The legislation it has been putting forward has been very open to interpretation, court challenges and so on.

I would like to ask the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster if she sees the same possible challenges with this legislation if it is not improved through the process of the committee work, where witnesses and legal opinions can be heard. I would like the member's opinion on that.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, we have heard this a lot throughout the day, and throughout yesterday, that the Liberals were delayed in bringing the legislation forward. When they did bring it forward, they decided to prorogue Parliament for scandal cover-ups, and that is the only reason.

We are seeing a pattern. Not a lot of legislation was brought forward even in the last Parliament until the last six months. The Liberals knew an election would be coming soon based on fixed dates. Time allocation was put on everything to get it done and send it through for royal assent. We were asked why we would not agree to unanimous consent motions. That is not what this place does. This place is for us to debate and bring forward the viewpoints of our constituents, the people who we represent. It takes time to do those things, and they should be done thoroughly and thoughtfully.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, today we are once again talking about the hate that the 2SLGBTQQIA community continues to be subjected to. It is important that I state it that way because that is the truth about what continues to happen in Canada even with the progress we have made. Without adequate protections and legal provisions, Canadians do experience hate, with the pain and suffering that comes along with it.

I cannot wait for the day when everyone in the country will be free to be themselves, celebrated fully, without shame, without fear for who they are, and feel confident that they will be loved and represented in all corners of our society.

Someone once said that if we cannot love ourselves, how are we expected to love somebody else? I have no doubt that our charter supports that intent.

With that in mind, I am honoured to speak to Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code to include provisions that will limit the negative impacts of conversion therapy in Canada, though it does not go far enough to actually eliminate it.

Last week, I had the privilege of discussing how the rights of 2SLGBTQQIA Canadians were fought for, confirmed and celebrated in recent decades in a response to the ministerial address the day Bill C-6 was tabled. My Green Party colleagues and I will certainly be voting for the bill and when we do, I will be thinking of the people I have met along the way who have suffered conversion therapy and the shame and self-loathing they have had to overcome as a direct result.

Many Canadians, and many members in the House, have seen the biographical drama *Boy Erased*, describing the journey of a young man from Arkansas who travelled to Tennessee to participate in a conversion therapy program. It is easy for us to hear that story and clearly denote that conversion therapy is wrong. It is easy to tell ourselves that it does not happen here. The truth is that it does; it just flies under the radar. It is more insidious.

I have a constituent, a brave man, who spoke with a CBC journalist a couple years ago to share his story in the hope of helping others. He grew up in a rural New Brunswick community. Outed as a teenager by his browser history, my constituent was sent to a religious counselling service in a nearby town. He was told that he needed to pray for God's help to change, that what he was feeling was simply a sinful choice.

The counsellor suggested my constituent mentally put his gay feelings in a box and ask God to help keep that box closed. She offered tips to avoid future temptation, tips like "avoid flamboyant situations". I am so glad he ignored that ridiculous advice. This constituent of mine is a leader in our community and an inspiration

Government Orders

for young people today to celebrate who they are. The damage done by his experience with conversion therapy left him to fight feelings of shame through his adolescence and young adulthood.

The truth is that in church basements and family homes across our country children, youth and adults are being taught to hide who they are because it is something to be ashamed of. The real shame here is the damage we are doing to these young minds and hearts. We are limiting their capabilities by stunting their personal growth. We are dimming their light.

The harm that this process causes to people is immeasurable. It reinforces stigma, myths and lies. It has a profound impact on the ability of people to love themselves and to have self-confidence.

There is a recognition worldwide of the destructive nature of this practice and an acknowledgement that criminal law is an appropriate way to address that harm. We are not criminalizing conversations as we have so callously heard in the House. There should be no doubt about what conversion therapy is and our responsibility to stop it from happening.

Yesterday during his intervention, the Minister of Justice said that the purpose of the bill was to criminalize conduct related to conversion therapy. He said that putting an end to conversion therapy would be a reflection of the government's commitment to eradicating a discriminatory practice that was out of step with Canadian values. He reminded us that multiple professional associations recognized that conversion therapy could lead to various negative impacts on mental and physical health, contributing in some cases to death by suicide. I could not agree more with the minister. We must put an end to conversion therapy.

I cannot help but wonder why we are not going all the way with the bill. Instead, we are leaving the door open for a dangerous loophole.

Bill C-6 would ban the practice of conversion therapy for minors but not for adults. The specific phrasing that one cannot cause a person to undergo conversion therapy against his or her will falls short of providing meaningful protection for the exact Canadians most likely to face pressure from their loved ones to undergo the therapy. Leaving the door open to conversion therapy through the notion that one might choose to engage in this abusive practice means forcing Canadians to make an impossible choice: undergo the experience or lose the love and support of their families.

Government Orders

The bill does take the clear and unequivocal step of precluding someone from profiting from conversion therapy. It makes it impossible to advertise the service, regardless of whether it is provided to minors or adults. If it is wrong, then it is wrong. We know conversion therapy is abusive and cruel. The minister correctly has affirmed that it is a discriminatory practice that is out of step with Canadian values. As parliamentarians, should we not be aiming to uphold the rights of all Canadians to protect their safety and security? When something causes harm, it is a legitimate decision of government to criminalize the practice.

• (1310)

I will actually go a step further. Leaving queer Canadians across the country with the burden of navigating these conversations with their families and expecting them to stand firm against coercion, without the backing of a law that truly denounces the practice, amounts to cowardice. We are leaving these Canadians to confront an issue that we are not bold enough to take on ourselves in the public sphere.

I think of a constituent I mentioned early. I mourn the time he has lost overcoming shame he should never have been made to feel. Together we can make the bill into what it needs to be for all Canadians so no one goes through what he has experienced.

I am looking forward to voting for the bill and I will be tabling amendments to strengthen it at committee stage.

If I can be clear today about one thing, let it be this. Whatever people's identity, be it two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersexual, asexual or otherwise, they belong. Their right to security of the person is as valid as for any heterosexual cisgender Canadian. They are an integral part of our communities across Canada and we are here today to fight with them and for future generations to feel the respect and love they deserve.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the member of the Green Party. I want to add some thoughts about the importance of Bill C-6. It is receiving a fairly good response in the House. I anticipate a good majority of members will vote for it. It would be wonderful to see it have a unanimous consent, but I do not think that will happen. We can always be optimistic.

The legislation is one important component. It is a very important step, but also we need to do more than just legislative measures. In an exchange with the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, we talked about the importance of capacity and the government committing millions of dollars to build capacity for organizations dealing with advocacy and so forth.

Could my friend provide her thoughts and comments on how important it is that not only do we have legislation, but also do things like build on capacity?

• (1315)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, I raised this question for the member this morning about providing more investment and services. This is one step absolutely. It is an important step. As I mentioned, I wish it would go further to protect adults as well. I men-

tioned earlier about the wrap around care that we need. We can do so much more in our society to ensure that people are included and that they are represented and protected.

I highlight once again the need for specializations in trans care, in care that supports the 2SLGBTQQIA community. I am thinking about clinics like clinic 554 in Fredericton. They should be supported. They must continue to do the important work they do. However, we must go much further as well to offer support programs and information within schools across sectors.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all Canadians are opposed to people being forced to have therapy they do not want. However, when we studied conversion therapy at health committee last year, we had a disturbing conversation.

The gist of it was this. I was describing a youth leader of a youth group whose members were confused about their sexual orientation. The leader was explaining the position of the church with respect to sexuality. I said that if someone voluntarily wanted that advice, would that not be his or her right to get it. The discussion from the NDP and the Liberals was no, that the youth leader should be put in jail. That seemed very offside to me.

Therefore, I am concerned for people's freedom of religion to ensure we narrow the definition so we know that we are talking about conversion therapy that is forced on someone. Is this one of the amendments the member will be bringing forward?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, the amendments we are specifically discussing within my team focus on protections for adults, which come into play in what the member is bringing up.

What is going to be important is the witness testimony at the committee stage. I am very much looking forward to that, because we need to understand the intricacies and nuances of this conversation. I want to ensure that all Canadians are protected, as well as religious freedom, which is an important piece as well. We will have to wait for the details to emerge at the committee stage.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Fredericton for her speech, which was once again very relevant, as usual.

She mentioned in her speech that Bill C-6 is designed to protect children and minors from conversion therapy, but she made a very important point about adults who may be vulnerable and could be forced by others around them to undergo this type of conversion therapy.

First, I wonder if she can tell us what kind of vulnerable adults she was talking about.

Second, how can we better support these individuals who could be forced to undergo conversion therapy?

Government Orders

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague for this important question.

[*English*]

It is important to understand the power this bill holds. It is certainly important to protect minors in our communities, but this all goes back to the very core issues of the concept of conversion therapy, which is the coercion piece. It is the idea of the pressure someone might feel from their family to go through this at any stage in life, instead of feeling the love and acceptance they deserve. This is the piece I want to highlight again. It should be for all Canadians, regardless of their age. It is also important to mention the piece about not receiving money for this or being able to advertise it.

There is a protection there, but I think it needs to go further to explicitly ban the practice outright so that it protects adults as well.

• (1320)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to conversion therapy.

Let me say at the outset and in unequivocal terms that conversion therapy is wrong and it ought to be banned. I am hopeful that all Canadians of goodwill would agree that coercive, forced or otherwise abusive practices targeted toward changing a person's sexual orientation or identity are not only wrong but cause harm. They cause harm to real people, and the effects of such harm are real and profound. Such harm can be life-changing and life-lasting and, in the most extreme cases, can even contribute to suicide. It is on that basis that I believe it is appropriate to clarify in the Criminal Code that such repugnant acts violate the law and that individuals who perpetrate such acts are held accountable to the fullest extent of the law, punishable by the Criminal Code.

That said, while I support the purported objective of Bill C-6, I do have issues with the manner in which the bill in its present form has been drafted, starting with the definition of conversion therapy.

Obviously, when we speak of legislation with the objective to ban conversion therapy, it is important that we get the definition of conversion therapy right. The criminal law is a blunt tool, and it is therefore imperative that any Criminal Code prohibition be targeted toward supported and demonstrated harms arising from conversion therapy. Unfortunately, the bill as presently drafted, based upon the current definition, misses the mark.

In that regard, the definition provided in Bill C-6 is overly broad. Let me quote what the definition in the bill provides. It criminalizes:

a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.

Based upon that definition, it is clear that the bill is not targeted toward the kinds of forced, coercive, violent or otherwise abusive practices that constitute conversion therapy, all the while potentially capturing a whole lot of other activities, including private conversations that might be had with a parent, child or faith leader. It could potentially criminalize what are otherwise legitimate counselling supports or other psychological supports. When we talk about a definition that criminalizes any treatment or service that re-

duces or seeks to reduce sexual attraction or sexual behaviour, that is very broad.

• (1325)

Now, the government says that there is no need to worry, that the bill does not target parents, faith leaders or medical professionals who might be having private conversations or who might be otherwise acting in good faith to counsel or assist someone who is going through difficulty with their sexual identity or sexual orientation. In that regard, the Department of Justice website provides a reassurance. Let me read that reassurance into the record. It states:

These new offences would not criminalise private conversations in which personal views on sexual orientation, sexual feelings or gender identity are expressed such as where teachers, school counsellors, pastoral counsellors, faith leaders, doctors, mental health professionals, friends or family members provide affirming support to persons struggling with their sexual orientation, sexual feelings, or gender identity.

The Minister of Justice has provided similar reassurances.

Now, while such reassurances from the Department of Justice website and the minister are welcome, what matters in a court of law is not an opinion provided by the Department of Justice with respect to its interpretation of the bill, nor that of the minister. What matters is what is in the bill and what is completely missing from the bill. Completely absent from the bill are any exceptions to protect parents, health professionals, faith leaders and, indeed, any of the groups of people the government, in its own public statements, states that the legislation does not seek to target.

Yesterday in the House, the Minister of Justice hung his hat on an exception provided in the bill. Let me read that exception. It states:

For greater certainty, this definition does not include a practice, treatment or service that relates

(b) to a person's exploration of their identity or to its development.

That is better than nothing, but I say it is ambiguous, vague, subject to interpretation and insufficient in having regard for the very serious penalties that could arise from breaching this legislation if it is passed, one of which is up to five years behind bars. I hope that when this bill goes to committee, the government will be open to amendments to clarify, in clear and unambiguous terms, that the groups the government says are not targeted will not be targeted and that it is clear in the legislation.

I also suggest that amendments may need to be brought with respect to the definition of "practice, treatment or service". Those terms are not defined. "Treatment" certainly connotes a therapeutic context, but "practice", for example, could involve just about any sort of activity.

Government Orders

In conclusion, it is important that for an issue this important we get things right. We must protect vulnerable persons from being subjected to coercion, violence or other sorts of activities that seek to change their gender identity or orientation, while at the same time protecting the parent-child relationship and the doctor-patient relationship, by ensuring that all charter rights are upheld, including freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of religion. We also must guard against legislation that in its current form is arguably overly broad and vague.

• (1330)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton is obviously from the same province as I am. Knowing that St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Calgary, Edmonton, even the College of Alberta Psychologists have already banned conversion therapy, why does the member think it has taken the federal government so long to get there and why it has not led, but in fact followed, other municipalities and groups?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton Strathcona is quite right that certain municipalities passed bylaws, including my own community of St. Albert. She is also correct in noting that, in response, the Minister of Justice said that it was outside the jurisdiction of the federal government, that it was an issue largely for the provinces to resolve and that the government did not want to legislate it.

Now the government has done an about-face. What its rationale for that is, I suppose we would have to ask the Minister of Justice, but now that the government has acted and we have legislation, it is important that we carefully study it to get it right, to protect vulnerable persons while at the same time ensuring that everyone's charter rights are protected.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite a number of members in this House have said the Minister of Justice made it clear in his remarks or the Minister of Justice said that would not be the case. The House of Commons being the lower house of the legislature of the land, it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that the legislation actually reflects the intent of the bill. I have raised concern before about the ambiguity that exists in the bill, with the universal acceptance that we want conversion therapy stopped, but the ambiguity that exists needs to be addressed.

I would ask my hon. friend to comment on that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right that the interpretation or opinion of the minister as to what the legislation provides is insufficient. What matters is what is in the legislation and, in that regard, there is considerable vagueness. That is problematic because legislation that is vague or overly broad violates fundamental justice and will be struck down pursuant to section 7. Surely, the government would not want that.

I hope that the minister is true to his word when he said that he is open to working with the opposition toward amending the legislation where appropriate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I invite my colleagues who have concerns about this bill and who find parts of it to be vague to accept it and have confidence in the work that will be done by committees. We believe that the bill is quite clear. It prohibits causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against the person's will, causing a child to undergo conversion therapy, removing a child from Canada with the intention that the child undergo conversion therapy outside Canada, advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy, and receiving a financial or other material benefit from the provision of conversion therapy. This seems sufficiently clear to me.

I would like the member to comment on this. He seems to agree with the substance of the issue, that is, the importance of banning this type of practice.

Why does he believe it is important to legalize this?

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I am a member of the justice committee and look forward to working in good faith to study the bill, to hear from a wide range of stakeholders and to bring amendments.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, about an hour ago, I asked this same question to a Liberal member. I asked about the clergy potentially getting criminal charges if they were to speak to an LGBTQ person. I was told that they were not going to be prosecutions for any of these violations, yet the member is telling me that, under this proposed legislation, there would be. Could he please clarify that?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, to my friend for Yellowhead, let me say that the legislation is currently vague in terms of its definition, such that there is a risk, a possibility, that individuals could be prosecuted in precisely the context the member just referenced. That is why I say that if the government is serious, if the legislation does not target and the intention is not to target those sorts of contexts, then surely the government will be open to such amendments.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to discuss our government's progress on our campaign promise to protect Canadians from conversion therapy.

The Minister of Justice and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth have introduced Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code related to conversion therapy. It is an important piece of legislation, which would ban the shameful practice of so-called conversion therapy in Canada.

In the summer of 2015, the Ontario government passed Bill 77, effectively banning conversion therapy for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children, and preventing medical practitioners from billing for it. One year later, I met in my office with Rita O'Link, a proud and prominent transgender advocate in my riding of Sudbury, who had led the charge for those changes in Ontario. Rita wondered why the federal government could not do for Canadians what Ontario had done for Ontarians and maybe expand upon it so that all Canadians could enjoy the same protections that Ontarians do.

Since then, I have worked with Rita and others at TG InnerSelves in Sudbury to advocate for the rights of the LGBTQ2 community to make clear that, when we say that Canadians deserve to live their lives freely, that means freedom from judgment and persecution. Rita fought tirelessly for free expression for all Canadians and made clear that conversion therapy is a devastating practice that is extremely harmful to those individuals who are subject to it. It is an honour to reference Rita in my remarks today.

Contrary to what some might say, there is no right or wrong when it comes to who one loves or who one is. Conversion therapy has been discredited and denounced by professional and health associations in Canada, the United States and around the world.

[*Translation*]

Conversion therapy has no scientific basis in health care, and people subject to this practice will experience its devastating effects forever.

[*English*]

Research shows that young people are at higher risk for depression and suicide as a result of efforts to alter their sexual orientation or gender identity. Conversion therapy is based on a lie that being gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans is wrong and that we need to fix it. Not only is this wrong, but it sends a degrading message that undermines the dignity of people of the LGBTQ2 community. Minors, in particular, are adversely affected, and the repercussions of this often continue into adulthood.

In 2020, many believe that this practice is a relic of the past and something that could no longer happen in our communities.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, that is not the case.

[*English*]

Even today, there are groups operating across the country, providing services in an effort to correct or fix those they deem out of step with their own narrow views of how one should be or how one should act. The community-based sex now survey, conducted in 2019-20, indicates that as many as 20% of respondents had been exposed to this vile practice, so we know that this harmful practice is currently happening in Canada.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Our government has introduced this legislation to ensure that no one will have to endure this heinous practice.

Government Orders

I am proud of what the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and our entire government are doing to put an end to conversion therapy in Canada.

[*English*]

Our government has introduced the bill, which proposes creating five new Criminal Code offences targeting conversion therapy. These proposed offences would prohibit, first, causing a minor to undergo conversion therapy; second, removing a minor from Canada to undergo conversion therapy abroad; third, causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against their will; fourth, profiting from providing conversion therapy; and fifth, advertising the provision of conversion therapy. It will also define conversion therapy as “a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person’s sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.”

If passed, the bill would make Canada's laws on conversion therapy the most progressive and comprehensive in the world, something I think we could all be proud of.

[*Translation*]

It is important to be very clear, however.

[*English*]

There is a difference between asking someone who they are and discussing it, and telling someone that who they are is wrong and in need of fixing. I can reassure the official opposition and Canadians that supportive teachers, school counsellors, pastoral counsellors, faith leaders, doctors, mental health professionals, friends and family members need not fear engaging in important discussions about someone's identity, discussions that are often critical to personal development. That is actually mentioned, exactly, in the bill as it is written.

What is being targeted here are those who are actively working and providing services designed to change someone's identity based on preconceived notions of how someone ought to be or ought to behave. Criminal law is an important tool to target behaviour that is reprehensible and harmful to others. It creates consequences for those who would continue this work in spite of the clear data that shows how devastating the practice truly is.

[*Translation*]

This bill is a step forward in eliminating conversion therapy in Canada, and it strikes a balance between progressive policy and constitutional considerations.

*Government Orders**[English]*

I want to emphasize that this is about people. It is about ensuring that every individual can be who they truly are. This is another step toward building the truly inclusive Canada we all talk about. It is clear the legislation is needed, because it is clear not all Canadians can be who they are because of practices like this. That is why it is so important it be banned federally, alongside provincial and municipal bans. Several provinces, such as Ontario, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island, have already banned health professionals from offering conversion therapy to minors, and Yukon also has such an act.

[Translation]

The Government of Quebec also introduced a similar bill last week.

[English]

A growing number of municipalities in Alberta and across the country have also taken steps to end conversion therapy. I congratulate them on their leadership and I thank them for their efforts.

We will continue to work closely with affected provinces, territories, municipalities and communities so that we can learn from each other and come together to eliminate this harmful practice across our jurisdictions. I hope all my colleagues can look to a national consensus that this abhorrent practice needs to be prohibited and support this legislation.

We will continue working with each other and all members to ensure their voices are heard and our government continues to respond. Canada is a country where everyone, regardless of their gender expression, gender identity or sexual orientation, can live in equality and freedom. That is the kind of Canada we should want to leave for all of our children and grandchildren, the most welcoming country in the world.

[Translation]

A country for everyone.

[English]

That is the kind of Canada that four years ago Rita O'Link came to ask me to help her fight for in Ottawa. I am proud to stand today, here in the House of Commons, on behalf of Rita, the courageous Sudburians at TG Innerselves and the thousands of Canadians from coast to coast who work tirelessly to protect the rights of all Canadians.

● (1345)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleagues have been saying over and over how unfounded our concerns are regarding the purposeful ambiguity of the bill's wording. We have been urging the Liberals for months to fix the definition by adding the wording on the justice website, which is much more detailed. It turns out that recently the justice website wording was changed and a single word was added. The word "affirm" is now there.

I hate to seem like a conspiracy theorist, but why was that word suddenly added? Why would they change the justice website and

not the actual bill? If this is all on the up and up as they claim, why not change the bill instead of the website?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, that is a question the member can ask at the justice committee through her members. I am not sure if she sits on the justice committee.

I have heard the debate over the past few days, and it is such an important debate. From the official opposition, we are hearing that the definition is too ambiguous and it should be clarified. Certainly, those suggestions for amendments can be brought to the justice committee. It is a matter of Parliament, so they have that ability.

I also want to reiterate the clause in the definitions section where there is a sentence that says:

For greater certainty, this definition does not include a practice, treatment or service that relates (a) to a person's gender transition; or (b) to a person's exploration of their identity or to its development.

That is very important.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to pay tribute to the incredible team at Timmins Pride, Timmins Fierté, who have done such incredible work of being a voice for the LGBTQ community in the north. They also make Pride in Timmins a celebration, both of their rights and dignity and of the larger community, so that people feel this is an event that everyone can come out to participate in.

What is the importance of these celebrations we have in the north to affirm the rights and dignity of trans people, queer people and bisexual people?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, similar to Timmins Pride, we have Sudbury Pride, Fierté Sudbury. I participate each year. I am always there with them and I bring my whole family to celebrate who they are and who we are.

As a country, we have a lot of work to get done. Bills like this are indicative of the direction the country is going in: to be more inclusive and to be the most welcoming country in the world. It is important to have these events in small towns like Timmins and Sudbury, and across the country.

Yesterday, I heard my colleague from Spadina—Fort York talk about the Toronto Pride parade, and how transformative it is for people to participate. It is such an honour to participate and support the people organizing such activities.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague across the way.

Government Orders

It seems that the House unanimously agrees on the fact that we are going to legislate with respect to conversion therapy. However, some small religious groups are putting a lot of pressure on us to slow the process down. Some are even calling for disobedience; I would like to quote Georges Buscemi, president of Quebec Life Coalition, who said, "I cannot speak for the therapists themselves, but when you are doing good and the government says it is bad, I would tend to say you need to do good and face the consequences...even if it means breaking the law."

I would like to know what my Liberal colleague thinks about statements like that and those types of groups that are considering defying the law by continuing to do something that would now be prohibited. Does he not feel that guidance should be provided to such groups through some form of education?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Drummond for this important question.

Some groups clearly oppose this bill. On the other hand, it is important that we keep the dialogue going with these groups.

The evidence provided to the House and the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights shows the destructive impact these therapies can have on young people.

We have a long way to go with those who do not understand that impact. However, that does not mean we should step back. Rather, it is very important that we move forward and educate. We cannot just sit back and wait for this bill to pass. We need to engage with all stakeholder groups across the country and keep the conversation going.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House and speak on the important issue of conversion therapy, and why this practice should be banned in Canada.

Across the country, we have seen many provinces and municipalities take appropriate measures to address this issue, as well as the steps taken by the federal government to introduce this into the Criminal Code.

I have had the honour to participate in multiple conversations with members of the LGBTQ+ community from coast to coast. I have participated in round tables, lectures and, of course, pride parades. Some of my encounters left a huge mark on me personally. Those encounters are what will live with me and have made me an ally of the LGBTQ2+ community.

One of the places I think about from my visits, and that I have spoken about multiple times, is the OK2BME program in Kitchener, Ontario. I was fortunate enough to visit this group, where all the youth are under the age of 19 and come from an area within an hour and a half of that region. They go there to talk about who they were, who they are and how they see their futures. Many go there for a safe place to have a conversation: to talk to people in similar situations to theirs and to rely on people. It is so important we have these types of organizations, opportunities and programs to allow youth to talk to people who are in the same situations they are.

Many of them are going through times where they are not expressing who they are to their friends, families or teachers because they are not sure and have a lot of self-doubt. Open places like the OK2BME program are something I will continue to advocate for.

Like the deputy House leader for Parliament, who I see across the way, I grew up in different times. I think of growing up in the eighties and the number of friends I have now who have come out and said they are gay or lesbian. Back in the eighties, I did not know one of my best friends was a lesbian. When I think about it today, does it matter? I love her to the depths of who she is. She is one of the greatest women I know in this world. It does not matter who she loves, because at the end of the day, I love her for who she is. I look at the way her parents embraced her, and they love her for who she is.

However, I know when she goes out in the general public there is that fear of feeling shame. There is that fear of telling people. As I said, I grew up in the eighties, when one did not share that type of information with people. It was expected for girls to like boys. Things have changed, and we have become much more aware that we do not all have to fit in that little box and all be the same.

I also think of the great work being done by PFLAG. A couple of years ago, I went to Richmond Hill and sat down with the PFLAG organization. There were children in the process of transitioning, and children who had just come out to their parents had come to PFLAG with them to have these discussions. We sat down together, ate pizza and celebrated somebody's birthday. It was such an incredible place, where everybody felt safe and that they were part of something.

It made me ask myself whether there was ever a time I felt I was not included. I have been very fortunate, because I am able to go into places and say, "I am Karen," and that is all good with me. However, a lot of people have self-doubt, which is caused by not being supported for who they are. I think of those people who have to walk alone in the world, and how we can do better. For me, it is important to make sure those safe spaces are available: places like PFLAG, where people can talk in groups and where parents can talk with their children. It is not a mediation, just a place someone can go to listen, talk and hear the stories of other families and the challenges they have gone through.

As a government, it is important we look at continuing to support those types of programs. If we are looking at more actions we need to do after the conversion therapy ban is passed, we need to look at what the next steps are in order to make sure we can get this work done. I say this because we need to look at the mental health component of this issue.

Mental Health Awareness Month is going on right now, and we have to understand the correlation between mental health and the LGBTQ community. I looked at some of the statistics, and I sat back and thought about how that was not me. According to statistics, one in four members of the LGBTQ community who are students has been physically harassed, and six in 10 have been verbally abused. That means over half of the people have been victimized at some time just because of their sexuality. There is no place for that.

Statements by Members

• (1355)

We have to look at the fact that people in this community have been body shamed. They feel isolated. Discrimination and bullying occur. There is a lack of support from some families. We know that not every family is 100% on board, and that comes with time as well. I am very hopeful. I am that Pollyanna who believes that we can do better and that we can have hope, so I believe in helping families go through these challenging times together. We have to be realistic: these things happen. We also have to look at the predisposition toward mental health challenges as well. I think that, if people are already uncomfortable with who they are, it is just adding onto it regarding their sexuality. There is a double prong here that is attacking them.

I also think of a couple of friends I sat down with about a month ago. We were talking about sexuality. My two friends are partners, Rick and Lee, and they do not know I am talking about them today. Rick and Lee and I have these really open discussions, and it is great, because we are in the same generation. I love to talk to them about music and cooking and everything, but after a really broad discussion I asked them how it was, growing up in the eighties. My one friend, Rick, said that he would not be here if he had come out in the eighties. He would not have been able to survive. He stated he would have taken his own life.

I think about where we are in 2020. How can people feel that they would have to take their own lives because of being members of the LGBTQ community? How could someone feel so lost and isolated that life was not worth living, just because of their sexuality? This has to be moved out of that frame. That is, not for me, a place that we can be in. This is where we have to understand that love is love, and I will continue to advocate on that.

I look at Lee, who is Rick's partner. They have been married for a number of years, and he said to me that he dated lots of girls, but as soon as he was done high school he went on and actually was himself. I think we have to understand, especially if we are looking at our teens, that when people are in high school, they are in a fish bowl. I went to a school of about 800 students in St. Thomas, Ontario, and everybody knew everybody's business. Once people are able to get into the real world, where there are not 800 people walking by and seeing what their business is, it may be a bit easier for them to live their lives with freedom, but we know, especially in those teenage years, that it is really difficult.

It is such a hard time to fit in, as it is. Everybody is on Twitter. Everybody is on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. I have watched it a couple of times, but everybody is on there. Life is cycling so quickly now for our youth, and there are already so many mental health challenges that they are coming across, so adding sexual orientation is something that should not have to be part of that conversation any longer. They should be accepted, and they should be loved for who they are.

Do I have two minutes? I could talk for 20. It is really bad when my friends on their side are trying to quiet me up, because they think I talk so much. Regardless, I think that is what makes me a good advocate: if one is willing to talk and have these conversations, that is what it is.

I think when we talk about conversion therapy, there has been a lot of discussion on what that actually is. For myself, talk therapy is what I do. I talk things out. Some people may say that talking is conversion therapy, or that it is something else. For me the ability to talk and work through my problems with the people I love and respect the most is important, regardless of how difficult those topics are. As a parent, I have had multiple difficult situations brought upon me or that I have had to discuss, and we all need that person and that support group around us. Being able to talk is really important.

I see that many members, and I have heard members of the government also, indicate there is that concern about religion. I will be honest: I was mad at my husband about six years ago, and the first person I turned to was my pastor. Members would not see me as a really strong religious person, but the pastor was the person who knew me. He knew me and my family sitting in the benches, where we sat as a family all the time, and I was able to speak to him as a confidant. I think sometimes that is where the confusion will come from, in this discussion. He was not trying to convert me: he was a confidant because he knew who I was. He has seen me actively participate in the church, youth groups and a variety of things like that, so I am proud to speak on this. I think we should all have this really important discussion, because at the end of the day, every life matters, especially those of the LGBTQ community.

• (1400)

The Deputy Speaker: I see there are members interested in posing questions and comments, but we will have to wait until after question period and members' statements for that.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

BAY OF QUINTE

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and thank our frontline and essential services, the residents of the Bay of Quinte who have kept us safe and well during this pandemic. Our community has come together to find accommodations for workers and to donate PPE, food and personal care products to staff and residents of long-term care facilities and retirement homes affected by COVID-19.

In Trenton, a group of sewers got together. They made close to 25,000 masks and raised nearly \$25,000 to purchase medical grade PPE for Trenton Memorial Hospital. To date, over 5,000 surgical masks have been donated to Trenton Memorial Hospital, VON and Hastings Manor. Another \$5,000 has also been collected from the sale of poppy masks to support the work of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 110 in Trenton.

Ongoing generosity like this is helping to boost the morale in our community, especially among our frontline workers, where it is needed the most.

* * *

DAVID BRALEY

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday our nation lost a truly iconic leader, the Hon. David Braley.

I was fortunate to interact with Senator Braley not just through his Senate duties, but over many hours of interesting discussions during which he spoke of his main loves, the Canadian Football League, its players and its fans. I was also honoured to attend his induction into the Canadian Football Hall of Fame in 2012. As a fan, I have attended many Grey Cup events over the last few years, and it became so obvious at those events how important David Braley was to the CFL and how important the CFL was to David Braley.

The Tiger-Cats, the Argonauts and the BC Lions all felt David Braley's touch, but he was so much more than just a CFL owner. He was a successful businessman and, along with his wife Nancy, did so much for his beloved city of Hamilton. The Health Sciences Centre at McMaster, the research centre at Hamilton General Hospital and the athletic centre are but a few examples.

He was a leader who led with his heart. We owe him so much for what he did for our country and for a life well lived. May he rest in peace.

* * *

RACISM

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to highlight the importance now more than ever to stand up against racism and hate in our communities.

Recently, I received a call from a mosque in my riding of Brampton East fearing for their congregation. On the news, I watched a Brampton resident have racial slurs thrown at him while on a golf course. Here in Ottawa, hate has taken the form of threats to someone's life, and there are many more incidents of hate and racism.

This is not okay. These cowardly acts, threats of violence and blatant discrimination against racialized people have no place in Canada. I still remember, as a kid in grade school 25 years ago, being told to go back to my country. To think that this is still going on is beyond belief. As we collectively face challenges such as the pandemic, we must remind ourselves of the strength our country can and must leverage from our diversity.

It is on all of us in this chamber to come together and stand together against all forms of hate and racism.

* * *

[Translation]

JACQUES GODIN

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the great actor

Statements by Members

Jacques Godin left us yesterday at the age of 90, it was the end of an era in Quebec.

His passing sparked a flurry of tributes as eloquent and complimentary as his talent was strong, sincere and impressively modern. Jacques Godin brought hundreds of characters to life in the theatre, in television and in film on projects such as *Cap-aux-Sorciers*, *Les belles histoires des pays d'en haut*, *Toute la vérité*, *Love Project*, *Les forges de Saint-Maurice*, *Des souris et des hommes*, *Sous le signe du Lion* and *La charge de l'original épormyable*. This gave his collaborators and fans a deep appreciation for his tremendous talent, great human qualities and commitment, as evidenced by the many awards and honours he received, including the Prix Méritas for best lead actor, the Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec, four Gemini awards, and the Association québécoise des critiques de théâtre award.

On behalf of Quebec and the Bloc Québécois, it is with a heavy but grateful heart that we offer our deepest condolences to Mr. Godin's family and friends.

He will live on through his work. Bravo and thank you to Jacques Godin.

* * *

● (1405)

A CANADIAN VACCINE

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not need to remind anyone that we are right in the middle of the second wave of this pandemic.

Back home in Côte-des-Neiges, the Plateau, Mile End and Outremont, we still have an extremely high number of cases. Despite the current crisis, I want to share some hope with my colleagues: hope for our scientists' work, hope for a better world, a post-COVID world.

For example, at the Université de Montréal, I was able to announce funding for a new research project with a truly incredible team.

[English]

Whether it is the researchers working under the direction of Kate Zinszer at the University of Montreal, or our Prime Minister's recent announcement regarding a made-in-Canada vaccine, investments in our country's capacity to produce our own vaccines with our own scientists give us reason to hope for the future. Our government is investing in that very future.

I find hope in this, and I hope that Canadians do too.

*Statements by Members***JOEY MOSS**

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to remember Joey Moss, an Edmonton legend who sadly passed away yesterday. Joey was a fixture in the dressing rooms of the Edmonton Oilers and the Edmonton football team. He sang *O Canada* proudly from the stands of the game, inspiring others to join along.

Joey was as much loved and respected by Edmonton's hockey community as the players themselves, though he always remained modest and humble. He also did much to help our community. During his 35-year tenure with the Edmonton Oilers and the Edmonton football team, he was presented with an NHL all-star award and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. He was also inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame. He leaves a big legacy with his kindness and dedication to our community, as we continue to recognize the contributions people with developmental disabilities make to our society, thanks to Joey's passion.

My thoughts today are with Joey's family, friends and the entire Edmonton sports community.

* * *

LEASIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I mark the 75th anniversary of Leaside High School and the way it has forged academic excellence and shown prowess in sports while fostering a strong sense of community spirit.

This anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate generations of fine leaders, leaders such as David Stickney, a math teacher, coach and friend, who demonstrated community service as a way of life. It is an opportunity to celebrate the Leaside Lancers, champions in hockey, football, cross-country, track and field, skiing, and archery. It is also an opportunity to celebrate the school's exceptional alumni, such as Paul Cadario and his work at the World Bank, Canadian Music Hall of Fame inductee Phil Levitt, iconic novelist Margaret Atwood, writer and humorist Terry Fallis, and 2020 graduate Sarah Jordan, whose annual food drive has helped over half a million Torontonians.

I express my thanks to the 75th anniversary committee for their hard work. Unfortunately, plans have changed due to the pandemic, but Leaside High School spirit is strong. We will find new ways to remember and celebrate.

* * *

[*Translation*]**NAGORNO-KARABAKH**

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 22, I attended a virtual meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and some of my colleagues.

The purpose of the meeting was to hear the concerns of the Armenian Canadian community about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. For nearly an hour, we heard the fears of this community currently struggling in a conflict with the Republic of Azerbaijan. After several attempts at a ceasefire, it seems the situation is still volatile and there is a high risk of regional escalation.

I am proud of Canada's role as a mediator. I would like to reiterate how important it is that both parties in the conflict remain open to peaceful resolution, including through talks.

I am proud of the steps the government has taken to enable de-escalation and a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

* * *

● (1410)

WOMEN

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they worked hard all their lives. They rose at six o'clock seven days a week. They were expected to multitask and master many jobs: cooking, sewing, housekeeping and even knitting to keep their family members warm. They had no free time because they also had to raise children.

Make no mistake, they certainly worked very hard. There were even courses and manuals to help them learn the job. The Good Wife's Guide was their duty and their reality.

I am sure my colleagues have guessed that I am talking about our mothers and grandmothers. What has happened to these women, most of them widows and empty-nesters? They are in long-term care homes or little furnished one-bedroom apartments. They never got paid, so they had no money saved up. They worked hard but were not paid accordingly. Judging from everyone here today, they did a great job, but now they are not entitled to a fair retirement income. After all, let's not forget that their husbands were the ones with the "real" jobs.

Esteemed colleagues, today we must think of those women. Together, we must commit to treating them better in return for everything they gave us.

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HOCHELAGA

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week was Small Business Week. To help SMEs, our government has provided financial assistance through things like the Canada emergency business account, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada united small business relief fund, which offers grants of up to \$5,000 across the country, and recently, the Canada emergency rent subsidy.

In Hochelaga, SMEs are at the heart of our neighbourhoods. Much like in Montreal East, our businesses and organizations have always led the way in social innovation, especially when it comes to the social economy. In 2016, Quebec was home to more than 11,000 social economy enterprises, and examples of such businesses in Hochelaga include Boulot vers, Distributions l'Escalier and Bistro Le Ste-Cath.

Statements by Members

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the winners of the 2020 Gala ESTim awards who proudly represent Hochelaga: Cuisine collective Hochelaga-Maisonnette, Coop Couturières Pop and Dermadry.

In closing, I wish all the young people in Hochelaga a happy Halloween and I ask everyone to celebrate in a safe and responsible manner.

* * *

[English]

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the challenges we face have been tough emotionally, financially and physically on Albertans and Canadians. Job losses, social isolation and uncertainty are some of the pressures that we are all facing. We all need to take it seriously that, as community leaders, we need to address difficult issues, and today I want to talk about suicide.

Over the last year, it seems like every week I hear that a friend, a family member or a member of my community has decided to take their own life by suicide. Today I want to share a simple message. If people are struggling, there is hope. I know that they can be brave. They can ask for help, whether that means talking or even texting a friend, a family member, a pastor, a health professional or one of the anonymous services that exist. There are folks out there who can help them get through those tough moments.

Lastly, if people see others struggling, they should be a good neighbour and talk to their friends or family members. Give them a call, invite them out for a coffee and ask them what is troubling them. That simple act can save a life.

* * *

POPPY CAMPAIGN

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Remembrance Day is soon and we remember those who are serving or who have honourably served and sacrificed for our country.

My community has the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 26 in downtown Kelowna and Branch 189 in Oyama. This summer we learned that one in 10 legion branches across the country were facing imminent closure and over 350 more were in financial difficulty. Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans Kelowna Unit 76 clubhouse recently closed due to its building being sold. There is certainly a gap in Rutland while it finds a new location.

This year, legions have new challenges with the launch of their annual poppy campaign, a critical fundraising initiative. There will be fewer in-person sales. These veteran service groups also serve the families, providing support, advocacy and financial assistance free of charge. As well, they offer social interaction and well-being support at a time when many feel isolated.

People do not need to be a veteran to be a member of a local legion or Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans organization. They can join, volunteer or make a donation, if they are able.

• (1415)

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while big companies like Amazon have made billions of dollars in profits during this pandemic, small Canadian businesses have been struggling to survive. These small businesses are job creators and supporters of local charities; they drive our local economies. The Liberal government has a responsibility to support these entrepreneurs and their workers who are facing crushing debt and the possibility of going out of business.

Though some programs to get businesses through this difficult time have been developed, many of them remain inaccessible or do not go far enough to help those hit hardest by the pandemic. The government keeps promising support, but small businesses are saying it has failed to deliver. As the second wave hits, help is needed now more than ever. It is crucial that the Liberals fix the flawed commercial rent program and backdate it to April so small businesses finally get the help they desperately need.

Join me and the thousands of hardest-hit businesses across the country in calling on the Liberals to immediately table the legislation needed to save small business in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC MARINE DAY

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to mark this 20th Quebec Marine Day. This year's theme is "All in the Same Boat". This is a special day back home in the Lower St. Lawrence since we are North America's maritime gateway and one of the longest waterways in the world.

We are "all in the same boat" because the St. Lawrence Seaway is vital in bringing supplies to tens of millions of people on the entire continent. It is all the more striking during this health crisis.

We are "all in the same boat" because the marine industry represents no less than \$2.3 billion of Quebec's gross domestic product.

We are "all in the same boat" because in Quebec nearly 400 businesses generate 16,000 direct jobs both on land and sea. That is \$1 billion in annual salaries.

Oral Questions

We are “all in the same boat” because our river is the cradle of the Quebec nation, made clear by the marine industry's contribution to our economy.

We are indeed “all in the same boat”, and so I say anchors away, full speed ahead and happy Quebec Marine Day.

* * *

[English]

SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about my home province of Saskatchewan, especially a big shout-out to all my friends and colleagues in the Saskatchewan Party. As many would know, we had our set election yesterday. Our election laws made it possible for Elections Saskatchewan to hold elections during these challenging times.

What did the voters say? They rejected the carbon tax. They rejected higher taxes. They rejected big government and big debt and they voted for a strong Saskatchewan. People in Saskatchewan are angry with the government in Ottawa right now. They need to know that Ottawa cares rather than take our money and cancelling our industries. Right now the Liberals are offering us nothing.

I would like to once again congratulate my home province for voting for a strong Saskatchewan.

* * *

2020 BY-ELECTIONS

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Liberal caucus, our warmest congratulations to the two new members on their election wins in Toronto Centre and York Centre. They are deeply connected to their communities and have put kindness and compassion at the core of their service. They shared important messages with residents and the results speak for themselves.

Last night, the Conservatives did worse in both ridings than under Stephen Harper in 2015. Our government will continue to support Canadians throughout the pandemic and unlike the Conservatives, we will continue to invest in Canada.

[Translation]

We will continue to fight for an inclusive policy and always strongly oppose fear, division and hate.

[English]

Last night's results are significant. For the very first time in Canadian history, 100 women will take their seats together as members of Parliament, an extraordinary moment not only for Canadian women but for all of Canada.

Welcome to the new members of the House of Commons. Together we will build back better.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1420)

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last month, we learned that the Liberal government allowed two different American billionaires to enter Canada, and it waived quarantine rules. Both times, the public safety minister said he had no knowledge of what happened, but he is just one of five ministers who can approve such waivers. Since the public safety minister did not do it, it must have been the Prime Minister, so my question is for him. Why is there one set of rules for the rich friends of the government and one set of rules for everyone else?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows well that it was a decision taken on the border by locals on the ground, that was made in error and the situation was fixed afterward.

I want to take this moment to thank all the volunteers, voters, organizers and election workers who participated in by-elections in both Toronto Centre and York Centre yesterday. We showed that during a pandemic, Canadians continue to believe strongly in the strength of our democratic institutions.

I want to congratulate Marci Ien and Ya'ara Saks on being elected as the Liberal members of Parliament for Toronto Centre and York Centre. We look forward to having these two strong women join our House.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after weeks of being pushed by families of the victims and by my colleague from Lakeland, the government finally relented and announced the beginning of the public inquiry into the worst mass shooting in Nova Scotia in Canada's history.

This was after the Liberals had to backtrack on their decision to refuse to even hold an inquiry, a decision that was panned by every Nova Scotian in this House, including members of the Prime Minister's own caucus. Why did the Prime Minister delay delivering justice to the families in Nova Scotia?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, following one of the worst mass shootings in Canada's history, I had the sorry responsibility to speak with the members of families who lost loved ones, who had their lives and their communities shattered. I gave them a commitment that we would find out exactly what happened, what errors were made and who was to be held responsible for those errors; and demonstrate that we were committed to getting the answers all Nova Scotians, indeed all Canadians, want.

We proposed an inquiry that would be able to move quickly on that, but families said they wanted a national public inquiry. That is exactly what we are moving forward with, so that they get all the answers they need the way they need them.

*Oral Questions***ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE**

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last week, the Minister of Indigenous Services and the grand chief of the Assembly of First Nations both called on the RCMP commissioner to resign. The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has been silent. The minister blamed CB-SA officers for his failures, and now his own cabinet colleague is calling for the resignation of a chief under his watch. It is hard to believe that minister was once a chief himself.

My question for the Prime Minister is simple: Who is in charge of the RCMP?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a long history of systemic racism in our institutions in this country, including in the RCMP. We have acknowledged, as has the commissioner, that throughout its history the service has not always treated racialized and indigenous people fairly. There is no question for anyone on this side of the House that systemic racism exists within the RCMP. We are therefore working with the commissioner, who will bring forward meaningful change to ensure police treat all people with dignity and respect.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the first wave of the pandemic, the government was slow to act on many fronts, including the border, emergency programs and rapid testing. Other countries are using a million tests a week, whereas Canada is using almost none.

Why did the Prime Minister not learn from the first wave, and when will he start actually doing his job?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, public health agencies started holding meetings in early January to look at what was coming out of China and to raise concerns about the arrival of the pandemic. As soon as the pandemic arrived in Canada, we provided the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, to millions of Canadians across the country. Our public servants worked extremely quickly to almost immediately provide the help people needed.

The Leader of the Opposition says that we were wrong to help families first and that we should have helped businesses. We did help businesses, but we helped families first.

* * *

• (1425)

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister talks as though he is partnering with the provinces, but his minister blamed Quebec and the other provinces for the current situation. At the same time, the Prime Minister said that he would interfere in provincial jurisdictions.

Will the Prime Minister finally stop blaming others and get to work?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we respect and understand provincial jurisdictions, which means we recognize that long-term care homes, for example, are Quebec's responsibility.

However, we want to work with Quebec and all provinces to ensure that seniors across the country are protected and that there are standards of care in order to reassure families, seniors and all Canadians. We are taking care of seniors all across the country. The federal government is responsible for protecting all Canadians, and that is what we are going to do.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when I asked about a University of Ottawa professor being deprived of her freedom, the Prime Minister replied that we are responsible for what we say. I imagine that we are just as responsible for the makeup we wear. I refused to define him as a racist during his blackface scandal.

In a similar vein, will the Prime Minister acknowledge that the Indian Act is racist and systemic and that the act's name, which contains the "I" word, is just as insulting to Canada's first nations?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has recognized for many years that the Indian Act is a colonial law that is part of systemic racism, which, incidentally, the Bloc does not recognize, and that it is a problem that must be resolved.

We are working with indigenous peoples at their own pace to move beyond the Indian Act. We have signed agreements with several communities, and we are working with all communities across the country to do away with this legislation. We will do it in partnership, not by decree like the Bloc Québécois wants.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are not living in a fantasy world where history can be rewritten. The Bloc Québécois supports a nation-to-nation relationship. I get the impression that the Prime Minister does not know what a nation is. The Prime Minister probably does not watch the news, because the Bloc Québécois publicly recognized the concept of systemic racism in March. I do not know where the Prime Minister was. Now, he is the sponsor and person responsible for the Indian Act. Matthew, chapter 7, verses 3 to 5 mention something about motes and beams. Does that mean anything to him?

Will he set a deadline for abolishing that act by agreement, via a nation-to-nation treaty between Canada and the first nations?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): If the leader of the Bloc Québécois would bother to spend some time talking to representatives of Canada's indigenous communities, he would see that many of them want to ensure that they will continue to have the protections and partnerships set out in this unfair colonial act before it goes away, while others want to do away with it more quickly.

We are working in partnership with them, and we will continue to respect this reconciliation process as partners, moving at their pace, not our own.

* * *

PHARMACARE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I met with FTQ leaders. They reiterated their demand for fully public universal pharmacare. They said that close to one million Quebecers do not buy the medication they need because it costs too much.

Why is the Prime Minister dragging his heels instead of creating a fully public universal pharmacare program?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nobody should have to choose between paying for medication and buying groceries to put food on the table and in the cupboard.

We will keep working with the provinces to reduce the cost of medication across the country. We have already made great strides, reducing drug costs by about \$13 billion. We will continue to work closely with the provinces, while respecting their jurisdiction, to deliver a pharmacare system that costs Canadians less, so they can afford the medications they need.

* * *

● (1430)

[English]

CHILD CARE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Tunney's Pasture has a day care centre in Ottawa that is not for profit. Its landlord recently increased its rent to \$14,000 a month, forcing this day care to close. However, here is the clincher. Guess who the landlord is. It is the Government of Canada. It is unbelievable that the government would allow this to happen. It really sucks when someone's day care centre shuts down in the middle of a pandemic.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his words on child care were, again, just empty promises?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will be looking into this situation because it is indeed alarming. I thank the leader of the New Democratic Party for bringing that up.

I also want to highlight that we have been working closely with the provinces on moving forward on child care. We know child care is not just a social necessity, but an economic necessity. This pandemic has shown the cost to women who are having to make impossible choices between caring for their kids, or seeing their kids cared for and getting back to work. This needs to come to an end. That is why we are moving forward on child care.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are reports this morning that bilingualism in the public service has been put on the back burner during the pandemic. When public servants on the same team cannot understand one another, it leads to bad decisions and complete chaos, as evidenced by how some of the support measures were implemented.

I have a very simple question. Has the lack of bilingualism in the public service caused any problems in the implementation of support measures?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a francophone from Quebec myself, I am very pleased to be able to answer this very important question.

I think we all agree that French in the public service is essential, not only to ensure that public servants can do their jobs, but obviously to properly serve Canadians in their preferred language. We will continue to work very hard with the public service to ensure that everyone understands that the right to work in French is an essential right.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if we are talking about the same thing, but video conferences are in English only and the documents are never translated. In the COVID-19 era, francophones in public health are feeling increasingly isolated.

It is not as though the government did not know. The Commissioner of Official Languages raised the problem, but again, the Liberals did nothing. That is quite a message to send to francophones in public health, who are being left to fend for themselves.

Why did the government ignore the Commissioner of Official Languages?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague again for the opportunity to speak to this extremely important issue.

Like him, I share the sentiment that the right to work in French in the public service is an absolutely essential right.

However, unlike him, I recognize that we are working very well and very productively with the Commissioner of Official Languages. We will continue to do so because he is vital to ensuring that the public service always completely respects freedom of choice of language and the ability to work in the language of one's choice.

*Oral Questions**[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the Prime Minister gets hundreds of requests to meet with Canadians from right across the country. I am sure that, because the Prime Minister's time is precious, he must make deliberate decisions on who he meets with and why.

With that mind, why did the Prime Minister choose to meet with multiple Chinese Communist Party elites who have apparent links to gangs, illegal casinos and organized crime here in Canada?

• (1435)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer that question. As we all know in the House, the relationship between China and Canada is an intricate, difficult and complex relationship, which we are managing carefully, particularly in light of the fact that we have Canadians who have been arbitrarily held in detention.

We will continue to do everything we can to ensure that human rights are protected and Canadian lives are protected. We will continue to speak up, strongly and forcefully, on all issues that affect us in that relationship with China.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that some of these bad actors are also big donors to the Liberal Party and the Trudeau Foundation. We are known by the company we keep, and the Prime Minister seems quite comfortable hanging out with Chinese Community Party officials.

It begs the question: Does the Prime Minister's fear of Communist China and his refusal to, for example, ban Huawei from Canada's 5G or stand up for Canadians who are being held hostage in China have anything to do with his being compromised by his cozy relationship with CCP officials?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to standing up to China. We were the very first country in the world to suspend our extradition treaty after the imposition of a national security law. We suspended the export of sensitive equipment. We have updated our travel advisory.

We have been a leading voice in the world when it comes to defending human rights. We will continue to defend the rights and interests of Canadians around the world and stand up against anyone who would go against our interests.

* * *

*[Translation]***TAXATION**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is waging a war on work and keeping poor people poor.

According to a Department of Finance report obtained by journalist Jordan Press, a single mother earning \$30,000 would lose almost 70 cents on every additional dollar earned. If she earned \$55,000, she would lose 80 cents on every additional dollar earned. The least fortunate lose the most.

Why is the government penalizing people trying to work their way out of poverty?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard of a wolf in sheep's clothing, but I never thought I would see one on the floor of the House of Commons.

The reality is, when we put forward measures to actually cut taxes for the middle class and raise taxes on the wealthiest 1%, that member voted against it. When we changed the Canada child benefit to put more money in the pockets of middle-class families and stopped sending child care cheques to millionaires, that member voted against it.

With respect to the measures we put forward in this pandemic to ensure that middle-class and low-income families could keep food on the table and a roof over their heads, that member stepped up to the microphone and said that an approach of big fat government programs would not help Canadians. Those workers deserve to know that their government will have their backs and that is precisely what we will do.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member is a sheep in wolf's clothing. Speaking of creatures that do not actually exist, he speaks about this so-called middle-class tax cut. The report from the Department of Finance says that its effects are "difficult to spot". It is kind of like the Loch Ness Monster: big, notorious, spoken of often, but no evidence it actually exists.

What the report does say is that when poor people in the country get up and go to work, the government takes more in clawbacks and taxes than they are allowed to keep of that extra Canadian dollar. Why are the Liberals punishing workers?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I am entertained by the hon. member citing a mythical creature that is dear to my Scottish heritage, that is about as far as I can remain interested in this ridiculous line of questioning.

The reality is, programs like the Canada emergency response benefit have landed on the kitchen tables of nine million Canadians. Programs like the Canada emergency wage subsidy have protected the jobs of three million Canadians. Programs like the emergency business account have supported 775,000 Canadian businesses so workers can remain on the payroll.

The reality is, when it comes to supporting low-income workers, we are looking out for their interests and, more important, advancing programs that are actually helping them get by during a time of unprecedented difficulty.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Quebec announced that businesses in the red zone would stay closed until November 23. We are entering the second month of the second wave, but entire sectors of our economy are still waiting for Ottawa to help with fixed costs for the first month. These businesses are closer than ever to bankruptcy.

The government missed the mark with its rent relief for SMEs in the first wave, and it was not there during the first month of the second wave. When will the government finally table a real assistance program for fixed costs in the House, one that effectively meets the needs of Quebec's SMEs? I want a date.

- (1440)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that our businesses are struggling right now, especially those in red zones.

We hope to be able to work with the Bloc Québécois to reach our objective, which is of course to develop new measures to directly help tenants with commercial rent, support our SMEs with \$60,000 loans, \$20,000 of which is forgivable, and maintain the wage subsidy.

I hope to be able to work with my colleague to help businesses.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to, but I did not hear a date.

I will give a date. On April 11, the Bloc Québécois amended a motion to say that businesses need assistance for fixed costs. There must still have been snow on the ground back on April 11, and the government voted in favour of that motion.

Since then, it has put forward an embarrassing rent relief program that businesses were not able to access. Here we are, in the second month of the second wave. The snow is back. We should not still be making it up as we go. Quebec took action to help SMEs with fixed costs on day one of the second wave.

Here we are. We want a date. When will the government provide effective assistance for our SMEs?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada work very well on economic measures. In fact, Quebec's minister of the economy has thanked the Government of Canada for all the help it has provided since the pandemic began.

Business owners across Quebec and Canada, from my colleague's riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue to Ahuntsic—Cartierville, know full well that we have been there for them from the outset, with loans, cash, partial subsidies, and assistance for fixed costs as well.

We will continue to be there. We have been there for them from the outset, and we will also be there in the future.

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Radio-Canada reported that the Liberals signed contracts that gave the United States and Britain first access to vaccines ahead of Canadians. Potential vaccines from Novavax, AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Moderna all report a minimum three-month delay for Canadians in favour of Americans and the Brits.

Are the Liberals worried about producing documents related to the COVID vaccine because they know they will show they have signed contracts that put Canadians at the back of the line like they did with rapid testing?

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have finalized seven agreements, and we are in negotiations with a number of other suppliers.

[English]

We are going to continue to work with all those companies to ensure that Canadians have access to vaccines as soon as they are approved. We are working diligently to ensure that once a vaccine is ready, we will be ready to deliver it to Canadians.

We are going to protect Canadians and we are going to stand by them right through this pandemic.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no answer there. That is interesting.

Radio-Canada did report that Canadians would have the COVID vaccines delivered later than other countries. I think that is what the parliamentary secretary was dancing around there. That sort of incompetence means that just like the Liberals delay in rapid tests, the fact that we do not have rapid tests right now and we are seeing cases increase, when a vaccine is eventually ready, Canada will be at the back of the line.

I will ask again. Could the minister confirm that she agreed to contracts that put Canadians three months behind, at a minimum, the Americans when it came to a COVID-19 vaccine?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is of course working on all possible fronts to deliver safe and effective COVID-19 treatments and vaccines to Canadians as quickly as possible. That is why we have seven agreements, with up to 358 million doses.

Oral Questions

It is interesting the member across the way is listening to experts now. She was not listening to them yesterday when they told her that her back-seat-driving motion, playing politics with our pandemic management, was out of line.

We are going to make sure that we continue to deliver the contracts, that we deliver the personal protective equipment, that we build the domestic supply and, yes, ensure that vaccines are there when Canadians need them, so we can put an end to this pandemic and protect Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]**HEALTH**

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening, Mr. Legault, the Premier of Quebec, extended the red zones for another 28 days. Restaurants are closed, gyms are closed, and other businesses are suffering tremendously. However, the Liberal government has a solution at its disposal that could help Quebec. It is called rapid testing.

When will Quebec get rapid tests?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will be providing Quebec with 200,000 rapid tests this week as a matter of fact. All provinces and territories are receiving rapid point-of-care testing over the next weeks to come. We have been working very closely with our provincial and territorial partners to make sure they have the tools they need so they can have a robust testing and screening strategy no matter which province Canadians are in.

- (1445)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a nice answer, but I recall that on January 31, at the start of the pandemic, the answer I received at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Health was that protocols were beginning to be looked at. After that, on February 9, our PPE was sent to China.

Can the minister confirm that hundreds of thousands of rapid tests will be sent to Quebec? Let us not forget that there are eight million people in Quebec.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Neskantaga are facing yet another week without clean water, no water for showers, no water for toilets. Health Canada nurses are being forced to fill jugs with water from the river. We remember the Prime Minister's promise to the people of Neskantaga, how he sent his minister north for the photo op and to promise clean water for all first nations. That was four years ago and now we have an evacuation in the middle of a pandemic.

What is it going to take for Prime Minister to sit down with the Neskantaga people and put an end to this disgraceful abuse of their rights and dignity?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say that it is entirely unacceptable that Neskantaga has gone without clean water for 25 years. Members should note that this government has invested \$16.5 million into a new plant to fix the distribution system and the waste-water system. That is cold comfort for people who have evacuated in Thunder Bay, except for the 24 members ensuring safety within the community. We are prepared to evacuate them as well.

Let me reassure the House and say that we will not rest until the system is fixed and members can go back and safely enjoy the water they are entitled to as a matter of right.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 19 residents have died from COVID-19 at Parkview Place in Winnipeg. COVID cases are rising in this facility and in other care homes owned by the federal government across the country. Their disregard for seniors and other residents, including disabled persons, during the pandemic is a national tragedy. Workers' and residents' lives are on the line and families are terrified to lose their loved ones. Meanwhile, the Liberal government is missing in action. People need help now.

When will the Liberals stop putting profit over the well-being of residents in long-term care homes?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the member opposite's concern about what is happening in long-term care homes across the country, and certainly the loss of life in the first wave of the pandemic was unacceptable.

That is why in the Speech from the Throne we talked about the importance of setting national standards. In addition, we have employed and mobilized, through the Canadian Red Cross, hundreds if not thousands of workers across the country to support the provinces and territories as they seek to prevent COVID-19 from entering long-term care homes.

We will be there for Canadians no matter which province they are in.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that safe, affordable housing is a surefire way to slow community transmission. My riding is in dire need of more affordable housing. That is why I was so pleased with the rapid housing initiative announcement.

Can the minister update the House on how this new program is being rolled out?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and her passion for this issue.

[English]

Today, the Prime Minister and I announced a new \$1-billion rapid housing initiative that will quickly build 3,000 new affordable housing units for the most vulnerable. The first \$500 million will go to the municipalities that have the highest number of individuals experiencing homelessness. The second \$500 million will go to non-profit organizations, indigenous governing bodies, the provinces and other municipalities. Quite simply, this is the national housing strategy at work.

* * *

● (1450)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a problem. Despite the billions of dollars the Liberals claim they have thrown at Veteran Affairs, the backlog in claims is approaching 50,000. In fact, it is now normal for veterans and their families to wait two years for their claims to be processed, while the standard is 16 weeks. This problem did not start with COVID. Something, someone or the system is failing veterans, and it has happened under the Liberals' watch.

Can the minister tell the House what specific direction, if any, he is giving Veterans Affairs to reduce the backlog?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's question, as it is certainly vitally important.

We have invested about \$200 million to allow us to hire new staff and speed up the process to make sure veterans receive their financial compensation faster. Veterans should receive the benefits and services they are entitled to in a timely manner.

As I have said many times, this backlog is totally unacceptable. I can assure my hon. colleagues that it is the number one priority for me, and we will continue to work on it.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is getting worse, not better. We are at a point in time where access to the benefits veterans and their families need should be easier to get, not harder, yet veterans are saying that they are having a hard time getting the necessary paperwork to apply for financial compensation and benefits, further delaying their claims. The minister knew

in the spring that the benefits could be withheld, because he and his officials were warned about it. Now it is happening.

Again, what direction, if any, has the minister given Veterans Affairs to resolve this issue so that at-risk veterans and their families are not prevented from accessing the vital financial support they desperately need?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for any veteran who is in a dire situation, we have the emergency fund in place if an emergency situation has taken place.

On the backlog, which is a major issue, I indicated to my hon. colleague that we have invested just under \$200 million to make sure we hire more staff; to make sure the department is coordinated better; to make sure that when a file is dealt with, it is dealt with by a group of people so that veterans will not have to go from one area to another; and to make sure that it is done faster.

We will make sure that we address this backlog. It will take time, but we—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after last April's tragic mass murder in Nova Scotia, families of the victims and most Canadians asked for a public inquiry. The public safety minister refused. Only after months of pleas and pressure did he begrudgingly agree. Now victims' families want all the reasons for that delay to be included in the inquiry's mandate. The inquiry has been announced but it has not started yet.

Will the minister honour their request, or will he make them keep fighting for answers?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. In the days and hours immediately following this terrible tragedy that took place in April, we immediately began working with the Nova Scotia government to get the answers that families desperately need.

When the families said they wanted a full national public inquiry, we listened. We have taken the steps necessary to put resources in place and appoint commissioners. I am absolutely delighted with the appointment of Dr. Kim Stanton, who I understand will do an outstanding job in getting those answers for Canadians.

The terms of reference have now been articulated, and it is up to the commissioners to determine the questions they will ask—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is actually half a year later, and it will be a while before testimony is heard.

The loved ones of victims are not asking for very much. They have been through losses and anguish that very few of us could ever imagine. They just want answers. They want to know why governments delayed, why they made them wait and why they put them through even more months of pain and suffering. The government does have the power to set the mandate of the inquiry. It should honour this very simple request of the families.

Will the minister ensure that the panel can independently determine the reasons why the Liberals initially refused to call a public inquiry?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand the member opposite's interest in whatever political advantage she feels that level of inquiry may get. However, to be frank, our responsibility to the families in this terrible tragedy of a mass shooting is to get answers about that shooting and about that tragedy, and to also make recommendations to the Canadian government, the Government of Nova Scotia, the RCMP and every other impacted institution, to make sure we take the steps necessary to ensure that this tragedy never occurs again.

We have now empanelled a national inquiry, and we will get the answers the families seek.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic is a convenient scapegoat for the declining use of French in the federal public service. The shift to remote meetings was all it took for French to disappear from both meetings and documents. Public servants are sounding the alarm because their work environment is going downhill.

Francophones are not second-class citizens. How will the government ensure that francophones in the federal public service can work in French?

• (1455)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to speak about the importance of French, not only in the public service, but in Canada. We are strong and proud because we have a bilingual country where everyone has the right to thrive in English or French. We also have that responsibility when it comes to the public service.

Let me assure my colleague that, as a francophone and a Quebecker, that is my objective and I am determined to fulfill it every day.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the French language, the Liberals are buying time. Meanwhile, we are going backwards. The pandemic must not be

used as an excuse to eliminate French in the public service. French at work is not a favour English Canada is doing for francophones, it is a fundamental right.

Will the government recognize that what complicates telework meetings is not the presence of French, but the presence of too many supposedly bilingual people who do not speak a word of French?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question because it allows me to go a little further and highlight how proud we are of the work that we have done in recent years to strengthen the position of French all over the country. We have done this through an official languages plan of \$2.7 billion, through the appointment of three bilingual judges to the Supreme Court and through the renewal of the Official Languages Act, which will happen soon. We have also created the Université de l'Ontario français.

We are very proud, but we also know that a lot of work remains to be done as we continue to strengthen linguistic diversity in Canada.

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[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government constantly tries to distract Canadians from its failures and scandals by saying it is focused on COVID and services for people.

This is not true in Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge. Our Service Canada office has been closed for months. City Hall is open, businesses and schools are open, the Service BC office is open safely, but Service Canada remains closed. Not everyone can access a website or stay on hold all day praying that someone picks up.

Would the minister responsible for ignoring the needs of my constituents apologize and commit to reopening our office immediately?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the member's assertion. In fact, our government is committed to ensuring that Canadians have access to the benefits provided by Service Canada. We have already safely reopened more than 260 Service Canada centres right across the country.

Decisions about reopening are being guided by our world-class public health officials and with a priority that as many Canadians as possible will get the benefits they deserve. We have introduced new services to ensure that Canadians can continue to access the benefits they need, such as the e-services Canada portal, and have provided over 4,000 community liaison officers.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***SENIORS**

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seniors come with memories: they are history books. In July, the government made a one-time payment to seniors of \$300 or \$500, depending on their situation. Many seniors are wondering what other support measures are in the works in order to help them through this pandemic. The Liberals recycled some promises in their Speech from the Throne, but they provided no clear plan on how they propose to keep them. As I said, seniors come with memories. They will remember.

What specifically is the government going to do to help this segment of the population? More importantly, when is it going to do so?

[English]

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the government remains committed to implementing the policies that we have reaffirmed in the throne speech, as we have said we are focused on managing the COVID-19 public health crisis. This year we invested over twice as much on financial assistance for seniors as we committed to in our platform. We provided financial support to seniors 65 and above sooner and with greater support for the most vulnerable. Our support provided over \$1,500 for couples receiving GIS. We will be there for our seniors, and we will continue to work hard to deliver for them.

• (1500)

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seniors in my riding are trying to plan their budgets with the withdrawal rates of RRIFs in mind. Back in April, the government announced that it would reduce minimum withdrawals from RRIFs for 2020 by 25%. Today, COVID-19 is still hurting investments and many seniors are wondering how this will affect their RRIF withdrawals in the future.

Will the government be transparent with our seniors and let them know what its plan is for RRIF withdrawals after 2020?

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want seniors to know that they are not alone. We responded quickly with direct financial tax-free payments, and supported over 2,000 local community projects helping seniors. We responded quickly to help preserve registered retirement income funds. We reduced the minimum withdrawals from RRIFs by 25% for 2020, and as the market is volatile during this difficult time, we will continue to look at ways we can best serve our seniors.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has impacted many Canadians with disabilities who have borne additional costs and challenges. Our government introduced and passed legislation to support Canadians with disabilities. Last week we announced that the deadline to apply for the disability tax credit has been extended to December 31, so that more Canadians could apply.

Can the minister please inform the House as to how many Canadians will benefit from this payment, and on what day these payments will commence?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning we have taken a disability-inclusive approach to this pandemic. I am pleased to announce that starting this Friday, three days from now, 1.7 million Canadians will begin to receive the \$600 one-time payment in recognition of the extraordinary expenses being faced by Canadians with disabilities.

I will take this opportunity to thank our COVID-19 disability advisory group, who in the spirit of “nothing without us” has provided this government with invaluable advice. We thank them, and we will continue to support our citizens with disabilities moving forward.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris-Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, carbon capture and storage technology has been extremely effective at reducing CO₂ emissions from some of the largest emitters worldwide, including power plants and upgraders. Countries like Norway, Germany and Denmark have all invested in this green emissions-cutting technology. Canada is a world leader in CCS.

With energy investment leaving Canada in droves, why is the minister allowing us to fall behind our international counterparts when it comes to CCS investment?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an important question. CCS technology is an important part of addressing greenhouse gas emissions, not simply from the oil and gas sector but from many industrial sectors across this country. It is part of a broader suite of technology solutions, including hydrogen-related and biofuels-related technologies, that we are focused on as we work forward to ensure that we not only meet but exceed our 2030 targets, to ensure we drive forward with economic progress and jobs while protecting our planet.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the expansion of the NOVA Gas transmission line should be good news, but there is a caveat. Consultations with indigenous groups ended February 19. The government then had 90 days to reach a decision. That was extended by 150 days. The decision to approve the project was made less than 15 minutes before midnight on the deadline day, October 19. The delay costs are astronomical.

How can Canadians have any faith in the regulatory process when it seems to function in such an arbitrary way and solely at the political whim of the minister?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government was proud to support the NOVA Gas pipeline project. Indeed, we think that it points toward the future for not only Alberta but the country with respect to natural gas and a potential for hydrogen, but we needed to make sure that consultations were done properly. We on this side of the House have learned our lessons from TMX. We need to make sure consultations are done well in order to make sure good projects go ahead in a good way, and that good projects get done.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here in Canada we produce the most sustainable and environmentally responsible natural gas in the world. A company called West Coast Olefins wants to make value-added products right in northern B.C. with its very own northern B.C. natural gas. Its CEO, Ken James, is trying to create manufacturing jobs right here in Canada instead of another country.

Will the government support the West Coast Olefins project, which will benefit so many of our communities, workers and their families, or just put up more roadblocks?

• (1505)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in speaking about NOVA Gas, we will continue to make sure that good projects get done in a good way. I am pleased to entertain any project and any proposal from any investor in the world, but we have learned, certainly, over the past number of years that we must make sure we adhere to certain rules, regulations and guidelines. We must make sure we consult properly with first nations, with Inuit and with Métis, and we must make sure that we take our environmental responsibilities seriously. When we do those things, good projects get done. We have proven that. There are 5,600 people working on TMX as we speak.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as our federal government has made clear, there is no relationship more important than our relationship with indigenous peoples. Since we were first elected, we have made enormous progress on advancing a renewed relationship, but we know there is much more to be done. It is also important to educate Canadians on the treaty rights of indigenous peoples and the need to observe them as part of our laws.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship tell the House how the government will demonstrate the importance of this relationship to newcomers to Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her excellent advocacy. From day one, reconciliation has been one of our government's key priorities. To build on these efforts, last week we reintroduced our legislation to amend the citizenship oath. The new oath fulfills the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action number 94, and ensures that every new Canadian, from day one, will have a greater awareness and understanding of the importance of aboriginal rights and treaties of first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to everyone living in Canada. Bill C-8 is another step forward on our path to reconciliation.

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HEALTH

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada is telling us that privatizing health care will help us deal with the pandemic. That is wrong. It is about enriching the Liberals' friends.

A former Liberal politician advising the minister is selling tents: Let us send them to a first nation that did not ask for them. A former Liberal MP wants to make ventilators: They say, "Let's go." Then there is WE Charity, Jeff Bezos and big oil: Make it rain.

When Harper and Martin destroyed our public services, they were up front. The current government cannot privatize quarantine health services. Why do the Liberals insist on padding the pockets of their rich friends?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this over-the-top rhetoric is exactly what Canadians do not want in the middle of a pandemic. Do members know what they do want? They want a government that is going to work together, parliamentarians who are going to work together to ensure that no matter where a Canadian lives, they have what they need to get through this pandemic. We are proud of the efforts to ensure that Canadians have the devices they need, the quarantine facilities they need, the supports they need and new technology and devices. We are not going to stop.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put this very significant question forward. I appreciated the points made yesterday by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills. We are looking at a humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenian population is being decimated. Ceasefires fall apart before they start.

Government Orders

Does the Government of Canada think it is a deficiency in our ability to deal in this crisis that we have no diplomatic presence in the region? We are doing what we can, and I applaud stopping military sales, but Turkey and Israel are sending arms to Azerbaijan. Surely we should be more active and on the ground with a diplomatic presence.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are deeply concerned by the violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. We call for immediate cessation of hostilities, strict observance of ceasefires and the protection of citizens. We continue to support the important work of the OSCE Minsk Group aimed at encouraging a peaceful and negotiated resolution to this conflict. There is no military solution and that is why we keep calling for negotiations.

I spoke directly with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan a number of days ago, as well as with Turkish President Erdogan, encouraging everyone in the region to cease hostilities and return to dialogue.

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● (1510)

[Translation]

TERRORISM

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to adopt the following motion:

That the House of Commons condemn in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack that occurred on October 16, 2020, in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, France, which attacked one of the fundamental values in democracy, freedom of expression;

that it note that the best way to fight against dark ideas is with light, and that this light comes through education;

that it pay tribute to the victim, Mr. Samuel Paty, a history and geography teacher at the Collège de Bois d'Aulne;

that it commend the work of law enforcement during this tragic event;

that it express its solidarity with the Government of the French Republic and reiterate our steadfast friendship with the French people;

that it note the unity and determination of the French nation to condemn this intolerable attack on the freedom of expression;

that it note that this tragic event reminds us of the need to continue the fight against terrorism, violence, hatred of others and intolerance; and

that it call on the federal government to fly Canada's flag at half-mast and to convey its deepest condolences to the people of France.

The Speaker: This being a hybrid sitting of the House, for the sake of clarity, I will only ask those who are opposed to the request to reply.

Accordingly, all those opposed to moving the motion will please say nay. Hearing no opposition, I grant the request.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay. Hearing no dissenting voices, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow PROC member for her very thoughtful speech. Just before question period, she made reference that some of her colleagues think that she speaks too much, but I could have listened to her for the day, and I thank her so much for her comments.

The member indicated in her speech that PFLAG in her community does some very important work. In my community of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, in 2015, I had the privilege of meeting an organization called UBU. Its founder, Michelle Leard, really educated me on the need for these types of services.

During her speech, the member also indicated that we need to elaborate on the next steps in order to ensure that people feel more comfortable with who they love and who they are, and to be who they are. I wonder if the member could elaborate on what she thinks those next steps look like.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate that question from my colleague on the PROC committee and the work that we can do together.

I think that there is a place for everybody, and there need to be those safe places. When I look at the associations that are starting in high schools and at community groups, they are all great initiatives, and we need to make sure that we make those types of investments. It may just be a time investment that we need to make. It does not necessarily always need to be financial, but we need that time investment so that we can be there to listen, always be onside and make sure that we hear from everybody who is part of this group. Really, it is time for conversations and time for great talks.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the debate thus far, it seems that the vast majority, if not all, members recognize that conversion therapy is just wrong, and that is really encouraging. It is really important to recognize that all parties, except for the Conservative Party, recognize it as a whipped vote, in other words, as a political entity, the party feels it is not optional.

I wonder if the member thinks it would be better for the Conservative Party collectively to make that statement by saying it is a whipped vote.

● (1515)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, we are asking for amendments to the legislation. As I mentioned in my speech, it is the confusion about whether talk therapy is conversion therapy or the talk therapy I do where we can have real dialogue and discuss the issues.

Government Orders

We know the legislation is not perfect and we are concerned about it moving forward. When this gets into the court system, judges will have to decide how to interpret it. There needs to be more clarity. Those are some of the concerns I have with this legislation. It is really hard when we know the clarity is not there.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is an interesting aspect with regard to the Conservative logic. Some Conservatives claim they are against it. They say they may have to vote against it going to committee to work on those things. I do not understand the Conservative logic about not applying the vote across the entire party to get it to committee so it can study those things.

How does the member reconcile the fact that if Conservatives vote against it, it cannot even go to committee to be amended?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, we talk about this debate being divisive. I wish I would be asked a question that actually matters when it comes to the LGBTQ community, not one that is so politicized as that one.

I will make every effort I can to ensure we have a real and valid conversation. I find that question irrelevant. I will continue to be an ally for the LGBTQ community. That is what I can do. Let us take the politics out of this and actually talk about the people.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope to ask a legitimate question that brings it back to the people.

The Liberals have stood time and time again today to give speeches, indicating that we have waited far too long for the legislation. The Liberals have been in government for five years now and many municipalities have told them they cannot wait any longer and have created their own legislation.

I am curious what the member thinks about why we have to bring the government kicking and screaming into this conversation when many municipalities have already done this.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, just a few months ago, or it may have been a year ago, a petition was put forward. Many people were working on an electronic petition, one of about three. The government had decided that it was provincial jurisdiction. We looked at the municipalities. We looked at Vancouver, Ontario, Quebec and different provinces across the country. It is interesting that the Liberals have decided to engage now. It is a minority government. It wants to build a wedge.

Unfortunately, that is my conclusion on that, but we could do better. At the end of the day, I do not disapprove of the legislation, but we need to do better. I just wish it was not brought forward this way.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code so as to criminalize behaviours linked to conversion therapy in Canada.

• (1520)

[*English*]

The bill seeks to protect LGBTQ2 kids and teens from the long-term harmful effects of conversion therapy, a range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person's sexual orientation. Passing the bill will send a strong message to people in the LGBTQ2 community that they are valued and protected by its government, that they are free to be who they are and that there is nothing wrong with them.

For those wondering, conversion therapy aims to change an individual's sexual orientation to heterosexual, to reduce or repress non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviours or to change an individual's gender identity to match the sex he or she was assigned to at birth.

It is rooted on the wrongful premise that sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression other than heterosexual and cisgender can and should be changed. That in itself should tell us that this therapy is harmful as it tells people that they should not be happy within their own skin, that they should not love and accept themselves for who they are. That in itself is cruel.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-6 proposes to add to the Criminal Code five new offences linked to conversion therapy: causing a minor to undergo conversion therapy, moving a minor abroad with the intention that the minor undergo conversion therapy, causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against their will, profiting from conversion therapy, and advertising an offer to provide conversion therapy.

The bill also authorizes courts to seize documents containing advertisements for conversion therapy and to delete those advertisements from computer systems and the Internet.

[*English*]

It is important to note that these amendments would not criminalize those who provide affirming support to people who are struggling with their sexual identity or orientation, such as teachers, therapists, parents, friends, etc. For example, if a little girl tells her parents that she is a lesbian and her parents bring her to a therapist to affirm that this is in fact the case and that it is not just a phase or a one-time experience, or if the child is confused or unsure about her sexual orientation, a therapist can provide to the child the help to figure things out, without denying the way that she feels.

Conversion therapy can take on various forms, including counselling, behaviour modification and, in more severe cases, electric shock therapy. We might as well throw in a lobotomy at this point. These archaic methods being used on children are incredibly harmful and have been proven to be completely ineffective. These practices have been rejected by every mainstream medical and mental health organization for decades.

Government Orders

Every leading health organization, including the Canadian Psychological Association, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association, have denounced efforts to change sexual orientation or gender identity and claim that attempts to do so can result in serious health risks.

Macleans published the opinion piece of Peter Gajdics, a man who lived through six years of conversion therapy and one of the main activists who pushed for the city of Vancouver to become the first Canadian city to ban it.

Peter was subjected to copious amounts of psychiatric medications, was told to release his pain and feel his rage during long sessions of primal scream therapy and injected weekly with ketamine hydrochloride before his reparenting sessions, where he would lie in his therapist's lap like a newborn baby so he could be nurtured by his new parent. Aversion therapy was also used. His therapist exposed him to a stimulus while subjecting him to a form of discomfort to help him flip to the other side. According to him, all conversion therapy succeeded in doing was increase his shame about who he was.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer and two-spirited people are harmed and stigmatized. Their dignity is undermined. These practices have resulted in tragic rates of depression, anxiety, self-hatred, drug use, homelessness and suicidal behaviours among the LGBTQ2 community, among people who have undergone conversion therapy. Indigenous peoples, racial minorities and low-income Canadians are more likely to be exposed to these harmful practices. Minors are especially vulnerable.

[*Translation*]

Conversion therapy heightens the shame and stigma that so many LGBTQ2 youth already feel. Although this bill is a big step in the right direction, it will not completely eliminate the harm caused by social stigma, which, unfortunately, will not go away overnight. It will likely continue more secretly; for example, a child would be told to act a certain way or to not act a certain way at home.

A study from San Francisco State University showed that LGBTQ2 young people who are highly rejected by parents or caregivers are eight times more likely to attempt suicide, six times more likely to report high levels of depression and three times more likely to use illegal drugs.

[*English*]

As my colleagues can imagine, parents who send their child to conversion therapy instill feelings of family rejection and disappointment in their child and risk damaging their relationship with their child for life.

I taught several subjects at the high school level for several years prior to getting elected. While my major at McGill was in history, and I enjoyed teaching that course very much, my favourite was ethics and religious culture. I had the flexibility in that class to teach whatever topics I thought would be interesting and relevant to my students, so I chose to teach them about topics that would help them navigate their way through high school and their teenage years. Among the many topics we covered were sexual education and gender identity. At the time, I guess around six years ago, I

knew that my Secondary II, or grade 8, students were figuring themselves out and that many of them likely had questions that they would never feel comfortable asking, especially at such a young age.

I wanted to offer them a safe space, to let them know I was an ally and that they could open up to me if they needed to chat. Lo and behold, some of my students did feel comfortable opening up and coming to see me one on one for guidance. While I do not yet have children of my own, I really cared about my students. My heart would have broken to think of them not loving themselves or not embracing who they were because of external pressures or because of not being accepted by their families. They were at such a critical age, and were highly influenced by what others thought of them. To think of the pain they would experience going through any type of conversion therapy is unbearable.

I know that health falls under provincial jurisdiction, and we cannot ensure that conversion therapy will not be practised without the help of the provinces, territories and municipalities. That is why our government will work with provincial counterparts to bring conversion therapy to an end in Canada. I am interested in seeing all parties work together at committee to come up with the best possible legislation, to protect the LGBTQ2 community and to ensure that everyone would benefit from the protection that this bill offers.

Each and every one of us should have the right to be who we are, and to love who we love without being ridiculed or tortured for it. While this bill will not end homophobia or transphobia, it is an important step in the right direction. I want my future kids to grow up in a world where they can be loved and accepted: one in which their sexual orientation or gender identity does not determine their love and acceptance, and where they can be proud of who they are and live fulfilled and dignified lives.

I strongly support this bill, and I hope that all of my colleagues across the aisle will vote in favour of this legislation to help make Canada a better and fairer place for all Canadians.

● (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her speech.

She urged all parties to work together to have as much support as possible for Bill C-6.

We understand that conversion therapy is completely unacceptable in this day and age. If the government would be open to a better definition of conversion therapy and including in the bill what was on the Department of Justice website, more Canadians would be likely to embrace what is proposed in the bill, which is absolutely necessary in today's society.

Government Orders

Will the member support us and work to get this definition included in the bill?

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I do not sit on that committee, but I am confident that all members will work together to really make this legislation the best it can be and ensure that it protects as many people as possible.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed my colleague's speech, especially the reference she made to having the trust of her students as a teacher.

Does she think a bill like this could help her students? Would this bill give her an additional tool to help her better support her students?

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, my students are now adults. Some of my students have given me feedback on Facebook. In my opinion, they are strongly in favour of the bill and totally against conversion therapy. That is my response.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we support this bill. We know that the ban on conversion therapy is important and it says to members of the SOGI community, especially to transgender and non-binary youth, that they are not in need of fixing. I want to thank the member for her speech, but also ask her about this bill being long overdue. It alone is not enough to repair the damage that has been done by conversion therapy.

Will the Liberals commit to investing in, and funding capacity building within, the SOGI community so that challenges as a result of conversion therapy can be addressed within the community?

• (1530)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I think this is an important first step and a significant one. In committee, I am sure members will hear of different ways they can better the lives of the LGBTQ2 community. I would love to provide any support we can give. I hope other members throughout the House feel the same way.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her speech and acknowledge our love of teaching. The member mentioned this was a protection for children and teenagers. I want to highlight the critical stage of 18- to 21-year-olds in affirming their identities and figuring out who they are. I also want to point to the high risk of suicide for people in mid-life who are dealing with some of these issues.

Should we not extend this protection to adults, as well? I would like to hear what she thinks about that.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I would personally be open to it, but I know there are some reservations because of charter protections. The way it is currently written, only consenting adults would be able to receive conversion therapy; however, actually giving conversion therapy would be illegal. There are many different ways of interpreting the way this bill is written. I hope in committee these things can be ironed out and more discussions can be had to better the legislation.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am also interested to know about the member's previous role as a teacher. I visit my students in Kitchener—Conestoga regularly, and now virtually. It is amazing how much we can learn from this next generation with stories about reconciliation and the environment. I wonder if she could share the message of acceptance this next generation is sending us.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I came from a school with a wide array of backgrounds and a lot of my students definitely felt comfortable expressing themselves and being different. It was a good thing to be unique at that school. I definitely think our generation has a lot to learn, and I hope that this generation can teach future generations yet again to open their minds and to make the world a better place for everyone.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by confirming that the Bloc Québécois will wholeheartedly support Bill C-6 on conversion therapy.

In our opinion, conversion therapy has always been disrespectful toward our young people and it is perfectly legitimate to do away with it. In fact, I would say it is high time we did something about this.

Bill C-6 concerns children under the age of 18, the advertising of an offer to provide conversion therapy, forcing someone to undergo conversion therapy against their will and material benefit from providing conversion therapy. Once the bill is passed and the law takes effect, it will no longer be possible to cause a child to undergo conversion therapy. That is perfect, because that is what we want.

Yesterday, I heard some Conservative members saying that we should not prevent a father from having a healthy discussion with his son about the son's sexual orientation or a teacher from having such a discussion with a student. That is not at all what this bill is about. It is important to understand that because it could change the way members vote on this bill.

Let me draw a parallel with other crimes. For example, robbing a bank is a crime. Similarly, forcing a 12-year-old boy to undergo conversion therapy would be prohibited, if the bill passes. Conspiracy to rob a bank is also a crime. Hopefully conspiring to force a minor to undergo conversion therapy will also be considered a crime.

Government Orders

However, if a teacher discusses the importance of not stealing and the importance of honesty with his or her students, that would not be a crime. If a teacher discusses how bank robberies are carried out and various possible scenarios with his or her students, that is not a crime. These things are taught in police academies. Talking about a bank robbery is not the same as conspiring to rob a bank. Similarly, having a discussion with a child about sexual orientation or conversion therapy is not a crime nor is that, in itself, conversion therapy.

Imagine that a child tells his parents or a teacher that he heard conversion therapy is available in such and such a U.S. state and he wants to go there to get treatment. In that case, the parent or teacher could tell him that type of therapy is against the law, but they could also have a healthy discussion with the child and find out why he wants to undergo such therapy.

I have met people who had a lot to say about conversion therapy. They told me about a watchful waiting approach and that sounded like a good idea to me. The idea is to listen to the young person who has questions about their sexual orientation or gender identity. By getting them to talk, we might help them to better understand themselves, but we must resist influencing them, because that is not allowed.

When a young girl feels like a young boy or a young boy feels like a young girl and wants to wear a dress, is that a bad thing, something that needs to be fixed? Bill C-6 says no.

We must let children be children. We must let them live their lives. It is healthy and normal to wonder and ask questions. Adults should not be attempting to change a child's gender identity or sexual orientation. I find this to be not only legitimate, but also highly advisable.

In fact, it is so advisable that a bill was introduced in the National Assembly of Quebec just last week. Bill 70 regarding conversion therapy was introduced last Thursday. However, since Quebec is very respectful of jurisdictions and does not want to interfere in criminal matters, it will not tell Ottawa what is or is not a crime. Still, Quebec does have legal jurisdiction over professional associations. It said it would amend the professional code and that a professional who provides conversion therapy would be committing an act derogatory to the dignity of his or her profession and therefore could be disciplined by his or her professional organization. Personally, I applaud this bill.

• (1535)

I hope it will pass in Quebec, because it is in the same vein as our Bill C-6. We want to let kids be kids. We do not want to stop them from questioning. It is healthy to question, and we want them to be able to do so.

I want to make a final point about the religious aspect of conversion therapy. That phrase comes up a lot in conversations about religious extremism. I am not targeting any particular religion, but the leader of any religion, whether we are talking about imams, priests, parish priests or rabbis, have a lot of influence on their flock, as we say back home. These people also need to respect a potential ban on conversion therapy. They are not prohibited from having discus-

sions on the topic, but they are prohibited from trying to influence parishioners.

We have to make that distinction. Based on what I have heard so far, this may be our main sticking point. Members must not confuse the right of a parent or teacher to have a healthy discussion about gender identity or sexual orientation with the act of trying to influence a person's gender identity or sexual orientation.

I will stop there. I hope we can all agree and pass this bill quickly at second reading so that the committee can study it and it can be brought into force.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging to see support for this legislation from members of the Bloc. The member raises a number of concerns. I think those will be dealt with after the bill gets through second reading and goes to committee. It should be an interesting committee, to say the very least, as I am sure it will want to hear a number of presenters. The minister himself has indicated his willingness to listen to what opposition parties have to say.

I am wondering if the member could indicate whether the Bloc has some amendments in mind at this time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I think we both want to achieve the same thing with this bill.

As to amendments the Bloc Québécois might propose, I cannot answer that question today. We usually have some. There are often little last-minute changes, but that does not really worry me. Insofar as we agree on the broad strokes, I think we will be able to agree on what one might call the finer points of the bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member mention on several occasions what this legislation does not prohibit. He mentioned, for example, consultations with teachers and religious leaders. I am wondering if he would be in favour of an amendment that would put into the legislation what it does not prohibit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, let me first clarify something. My colleague mentioned that I had said that consultations with teachers would be allowed. That is not at all what I said. We are not talking about consultations. When we talk about consultations, we are talking about therapy. I was saying that the bill does not ban conversations.

That said, I think the amendment proposed by my colleague could be very dangerous. Based on a principle of legal interpretation, when examples are given, this defines a concept, and anything not defined is therefore excluded. An enumeration, then, is always dangerous. One must be very careful, for it is a doubled-edged sword. At this stage, I do not think there is any point in enumerating what would not be prohibited.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's support for this legislation, which we in the NDP support as well. He spoke about feedback he has received from his constituents. Has my colleague heard from anyone who felt the proposed bill does not go far enough? If so, in what ways do his constituents feel the bill fell short of the mark?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I would tell my colleague that there are always people who think a bill does not go far enough and others who think it goes too far. What is important is to find a compromise, some middle ground. I think that Bill C-6 as it stands now is right in that middle ground, between the different points of view. It is important for children to be able to grow up without being influenced or without someone trying to turn them into someone they are not. However, it is also important for society as a whole to be able to discuss issues. We must find a balance in our measures.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord. I very much admire his ability to make such measured speeches. I have a quick question for him.

I get the impression that, as with Bill C-7, people will vote to please certain religious groups. I do not believe that to be the best approach.

Could my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord talk about the right way to vote on a bill that has this kind of moral impact?

• (1545)

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Jonquière. I am pleased to know that I have such a big fan. That is something.

That being said, I think there's a risk of starting down a slippery slope if we vote the way one religion or another wants us to.

We need to be careful. Religions of all kinds are important. I think that they have a positive impact on many people. I am pleased that there are religious communities, but they should not be telling us how to legislate. That would be a problem and would create conflicts that could never be resolved.

I therefore encourage members to be very careful about making a decision centred on religious beliefs rather than on the facts before us.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to speak today on Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code to criminalize conversion therapy. I also want to say it is an honour to

Government Orders

follow the member for Rivière-du-Nord and his excellent comments, as well as my colleague, the member for Saint-Laurent.

I will begin by thanking the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth for their tremendous work in bringing forward these amendments. They have given members of this House a rare opportunity not only to make lives better, but to save lives. That is work that none of us should take lightly. When this bill ultimately passes, it will make us all proud to be Canadian, and proud to be thoughtful, compassionate and just human beings.

Cutting to the chase, I am going to begin with a very personal story. From a very young age, I knew I was different. I saw the world differently from my friends, and experienced relationships with them differently. My earliest memories of that go back to the age of four or five, when gender norms simply did not align with my view of the world. Toys that I was told I should play with did not interest me, games and activities the other boys loved left me indifferent. My affiliations with boys, while strong and important, left me worried and sometimes afraid. Girls were simply easier, and left me feeling less complicated, less conflicted and more comfortable. Still, I wanted to be the best little boy in the world and did everything I could to be just that.

As I grew up and approached adolescence, my family and friends could tell I was different from other boys in the neighbourhood. Rather than trying to channel me into one way of being, they stood back a notch, were open to conversation, watched and allowed nature to take its course. In adolescence, these relationships with boys became even more scary and girls became even more comfortable for me to spend time with.

While I thought that was a sign, many seemed to think this was a sign of an emerging ladies' man, a very dated term, I recognized nothing could have been further from the truth, as is obvious today. Of course I played the game. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was simply too horrendous to even imagine being anything but a ladies' man. I dated, but preferred to do so in groups. I had girlfriends, and I now realize they were long-suffering ones. I had intimate relationships with women, but it was never me. It was someone others hoped I would be, someone others thought I would be, but it was not me.

Wanting to be the best little boy in the world, I did not want to disappoint. I filled my life with events and activities. I kept myself busy on the rowing team, skiing, being a political organizer and organizing events. I would hope to be able to plead being too busy when asked why I was not settling down with the right girl. Meanwhile, I was in a personal hell. My attractions to men were real, and I was in deep conflict.

Government Orders

In my early 20s, I finally sought help. I asked to see a United Church minister, not my own but a neighbouring clergyman. Don White agreed to see me, and I poured out 20 years of feelings, thoughts, anxieties and pain to him. He listened. He did not judge. This was in the late 1970s. While legal, homosexuality was far from accepted. Gay men and lesbians were made fun of, shunned and often hated. We could lose jobs, families, homes and even our lives. However, Don White listened. He recognized I was in great pain and with his wonderful wife, Barbara, they helped me find a therapist to talk to.

However, that therapist did not listen, he judged. He told me I had a choice to make, between an easy life of acceptance, career success and of being a father like he was, or I could follow my instincts and have a life of misery and pain, professional risk and of disappointing my family. It simply did not line up with who I knew I was at my core.

I went back to Don White who listened and simply held me. He said that, yes, my life would be more difficult if I came out as a gay man but that I had to trust my instincts, and he would do what he could to help.

It would take a few more years until I told my parents. Finally in the summer of 1983, I met with them and talked with them. They were liberal to the core, loyal and liberal to the core, of the good United Church tradition. I never doubted that they would love me, but I was still worried. I sat down and said I had something important to tell them. I started to cry. My mother asked me if she could ask me a question. She asked if I thought I were gay. I said that I knew I was gay. She said, "Oh, thank goodness, I was worried you had cancer or that something awful had happened."

• (1550)

We laughed, and both my parents embraced me and said they would do whatever they could to make my life happy and healthy. A few years later I would have to tell them I had cancer, and they held me the same way and loved me just as much.

Not every child has a parent like I had. Not every young gay man or boy, young lesbian, two-spirited person, bisexual or trans person has a parent like I had. They do not have a church or a pastor like I had, or teachers or mentors or employers or colleagues or friends or a community like I had. In fact, many have the opposite experience.

That is why we need the amendment to the Criminal Code proposed in Bill C-6. We need to protect the most vulnerable when they need it the most. We need to ensure that every person in this country knows they are free to be who they are and to become their own self as God or nature intended them to be, free to live, love and express themselves in ways true to their very core.

This bill is more than symbolic. It is very real in its impact. It would criminalize activities designed to attempt to change one's identity, no more than that, and suppress or reduce their same-sex attractions or sexual behaviours. It would ensure that no one can cause a minor to undergo a therapy designed to change who they are or how they feel. It would ensure they do not have to undergo such processes against their will. It would ensure that no one could make money from these so-called therapies. These are real and critically important measures that the government is recommending.

This bill also carries symbolic weight, and that is what I think scares some in the opposition who may be inclined to vote against it. I heard the Leader of the Opposition express his concerns about conversion therapy, and I thank him for that. I also heard him wiggle around and try to support the far right wing of his party. I think they are worried about this bill because it normalizes LGBTQ people. It says that we are okay. It says that we do not need to change and should not be forced to change. It continues the long evolutionary process, which began in the 1960s by the late Pierre Elliott Trudeau, of telling me and showing me that I am okay.

My hope is that opposition members will read the very fine speeches by the member for Calgary Nose Hill and the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London to ensure that we are unanimous in sending this bill to the next step. It is why I decided to tell my personal story today. However, it is not just my story. It is the story of a significant portion of our population who needs to hear from the House and the government not only that nothing is wrong with them, but that it is wrong for people to try to change them from being who they are.

We have come a long way since former prime minister Trudeau opened the legal door for people like me. Even since, the Prime Minister offered an apology for the way successive governments, Liberal and Conservative, have treated people like me. However, we still have a long way to go.

I read with interest that the new Parliament of New Zealand is the gayest parliament in the world, now with 9% of its members being from the LGBTQ community. It surpassed the U.K., with its 7%, or 45 members. Our House has only four openly gay members, or just slightly over 1%, which does not look at all like the Canadian population. It is still lonely for those of us who are different. Perhaps the bill would be a little easier to pass if the House and our government looked and sounded just a little more like Canada. Let us all work on that.

Government Orders

I close where I began, thanking the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth for bringing these amendments forward. I thank hon. members for taking the time to read this bill and talk to the community, and for some of the very magnificent speeches I have heard. I also thank people for listening so well today. I think many of my colleagues, who may not have lived my story but have now heard it, are now helping all of us. I thank them and am glad they are prepared to act.

● (1555)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for having the courage to share his story.

There is one thing that concerns me from listening to the debate today: It is clear that private conversations are not necessarily protected in the bill. The member has had conversations with ministers, and others have had the same types of conversations and have chosen differently, which is their right. I know that ministers in my riding are very concerned not only about private conversations, but about the fact that the bill does not protect their right to speak in a public square about the things they feel, whether or not they are the opinions of others.

I wonder if the member would be willing to support an amendment to clarify in this legislation the need for private conversations and the need for ministers to be able to speak in a public square as they wish.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say I would support that kind of amendment, because I think it is very dangerous. I think this legislation is very carefully worded to ensure that those kinds of conversations can happen.

Conversations can generally happen, absolutely. What this legislation does is ensures that no harmful conversations directed at changing someone's sexual orientation will get in the way of someone's full and natural development. That is what this is about.

This calls into question what happens when rights bump into each other, and I will take the side of the most vulnerable. I will take the side of those who are most likely to be hurt. I think this legislation does that, and I would urge the clergy to get in line with it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that wonderful testimony. It shows that, when it comes to identity issues, it is always better to accept someone than to turn one's back on them. I think that goes without saying.

However, I find this debate has taken on a 1960s vibe. Members are trying to sell this, when it is an issue that should have been dealt with a long time ago.

Obviously, we support this bill. Conversion therapy is something that does not make sense. There is an industry of sects that organize large church services where they try to pray the gay away. There is nothing therapeutic about those services. Of course, it does not make any sense. There is nothing medical about them and they cause more problems than they solve.

I would like to know why something like this was not done before. Why, in March 2019, did the government say that this was impossible? The government said that it was impossible to ban this type of therapy.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I think it is a process. This is a big step forward for the liberation of people who are gay, lesbian and trans, and I think it is necessary to do something differently at each stage.

I have a lot of patience for my colleagues from all parties, who can change their minds about the opportunities everyone should have. All people must have a chance to make a big change, and I hope that is another step we will take with these amendments.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of serving with the hon. member for the better part of a decade, and I want to thank him for a powerful, emotionally affecting and very courageous speech that really spoke to the profound importance of this bill. It also highlighted how damaging and dangerous stigmatization is.

I want to pivot to something else. In another piece of federal legislation or policy, there is a ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men, which is not based on science but on stereotype. We allow a sexually promiscuous heterosexual man who engages in dangerous activities to donate blood, but two gay men in a loving, stable, monogamous relationship are not allowed. The government still maintains a ban that stops men who have sex with men from donating blood, based on the most base stigmatization.

I wonder if the member would agree with me that it is time to end this discriminatory ban.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I agree 100%.

Not long ago, earlier in the year, I walked by Northlea Public School in my riding. There was a blood donor clinic there. Some of the kids asked me if I was there to give blood. I said, "No, I am not allowed to give blood." It is wrong that I am not allowed to give blood, and it is a loss to Canadian society that I am not allowed to give blood.

I will not stop working, even with my own government, until the issue around blood donations is based on behaviour, not on orientation. It is not scientific. It is not right. It is wrong, and it is part of the legacy of discrimination. I am really glad the member asked me that question because I wanted to get that out.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wants to request a recorded vote or request that the amendment be passed on division, I invite them to rise and so indicate to the Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: A member having risen, pursuant to order made on Wednesday, September 23, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 28, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

* * *

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from October 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, I recently celebrated one year since I became an MP. In my role, I have had the incredible opportunity to learn every day. I listen to people, organizations and advocates, and the discussion around medical assistance in dying is truly about listening. Today I will add my voice to an issue that affects us all.

Talking about death and dying is still taboo in our society, yet each of us must face it, not only for ourselves, but also for the ones we love. This conversation does not come easily, but for those whose time is closer than others, we owe it to them to listen and to act in passing this bill.

The debate on Bill C-7 has been passionate, emotional and raw, and rightly so. I wish to congratulate and offer my gratitude to each member of the House for their efforts on behalf of their constituents, family members and friends. Each of us has been speaking with our community members to learn their thoughts and hear their stories. Human agency has been on display, and the speeches before the House have shown professionalism and integrity, with a deep commitment to the fundamental rights of Canadians.

Sometimes we need a reminder that our constitution is a beautiful thing. It is the crux of why I am so proud to be Canadian, and why I feel so honoured to have the privilege to defend and uphold the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I remember first learning in depth about the charter as a grade 11 student. I remember the way it made me feel, the way it made me think about our lives and our interactions with one another, and the empowerment that it brought into focus. It was right around this time that I knew I wanted to some day to be involved in politics. While that seems like ages ago, it was only recently I learned about the urgency in amending our laws specifically concerning the issues within the legislation on medical assistance in dying and how it interacts with the charter.

I sat with it, without lived experience, and I thought of many what-if situations. I thought of the various scenarios and scary predicaments I would not want to face out of the risk of overstepping constitutional rights, if mistakes were made. I heard some of these same concerns from many stakeholders, from those who are concerned about how this would impact people living with disabilities or with suicidal ideation. I have listened to those concerns, and filtered this legislation through those important lenses. While I know some of these people may still disagree with me, I want them to know that I am confident this legislation strikes a balance and it will not have the impact they fear.

I also sought out opportunities to speak to individuals who had a personal connection to this legislation, and as it turns out, many people are willing to discuss their wish for dignity in dying, as well as their concerns about the current process and these proposed amendments. These individuals shared with me their efforts to pursue their right to bodily autonomy in their final moments on earth. In the powerful conversations I have had, the specific issues of advance requests and mental competency, as well as the discretionary role of a foreseeable death, were the exact hurdles to the peace of mind that would come from having control over their own death and final control over the pain.

There are Canadians right now who are suffering intolerably and enduringly. They already have do-not-resuscitate orders. They have made final wills and testaments, and have pre-paid for funeral arrangements. They have demonstrated their competence in preparing for death. They should be trusted to make a decision about the nature of their own death as well. If we rob them of this opportunity, then we have failed them. We have allowed our laws to overstep into bodily integrity and autonomy, an infringement of our protected right to security of the person.

I also want to address the language of “assisted suicide” and “euthanasia”. Our words are important, and it is important to remember that this bill is to amend a bill on medical assistance in dying. We know that a medical prognosis is the safeguard. It is the authoritative layer that protects individuals who are vulnerable.

The reality of the situation facing real Canadians is that co-occurring mental and physical illness is extremely common and should not be a barrier to anyone's right to bodily autonomy at the end of their life. Severe depression often accompanies other medical illnesses, and has a high rate of occurrence among persons with disabilities. As a further example, an individual may be bipolar and later develop terminal cancer. This pre-existing condition, likely to flare up in such a stressful time, cannot be the reason to deny the will of an individual to determine their final moments.

In conclusion, I remain firm that mental illness in Canada requires rapid access to effective mental health services, including in-person counselling and access to psychiatrists where necessary, as well as wraparound community supports. We also need to set national standards for long-term care to ensure that the facilities intended to house older adults are providing a quality of life that keeps them healthy and active throughout their later years, and we need to invest in robust palliative care to ensure there is dignity in living, even through those final difficult days.

• (1605)

I think of Hospice Fredericton and the peaceful, beautiful experience people and their families have in that environment. The option to welcome death peacefully should be an option for those who want it. We must also value and listen to Canadians with disabilities and their advocates. We can do all of these things and still pass this bill.

I do not believe that MAID introduces the risk that some patients will be forced to receive this procedure against their wishes. There are preventive measures capable of eliminating this risk. I do believe that my duty to uphold the Charter of Rights and Freedoms means passing legislation like this to uphold security of the person for all Canadians at all moments during their lives.

I will be proudly voting for this legislation. This is about justice. It is about empathy. It is about choosing to respect one's wishes and not interfering in that decision. It is about giving peace of mind to people, so the final chapter in their lives can be written in confidence, and their story can be concluded according to their own volition.

• (1610)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is very important legislation, which, in essence, comes out of a court ruling. The debate in the House really began on this issue after the last federal election, again due to a Supreme Court ruling. Listening to the many speeches on this has been very touching. I suspect it will receive unanimous support, at least I am hopeful it will.

In debate, a lot of members have been talking about related issues, such as the importance of palliative care and the need to do more in that area. To that extent, I would ask my colleague what her thoughts are on how important it is for the federal government to be working with provincial governments in dealing with some of the issues we have before us, including palliative care.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, it makes me think about where I am in my life and what the future could possibly hold. I know it really comes down to that choice. I hope that at that point in my life, there is effective palliative care to ensure that I have the choice to live with dignity until the end, if that is what is best for me as an individual.

Absolutely, we need to do far more, and we need to collaborate with our provincial counterparts. This is a huge piece of why I also advocate for an increased health transfer for Atlantic provinces. We

Government Orders

know we have an aging population. This is an issue we must confront, but the other piece is to ensure dignity in dying as well.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the way gave a great speech. I want to talk a little more about palliative care, as I am obviously a passionate advocate.

My mother passed away this past week, and she was fortunate enough to have excellent palliative care, as we do in Sarnia—Lambton. The government made a good beginning on the palliative care framework and starting down that path, but it has really not put a lot of muscle in it since then, especially during the COVID pandemic with so many people needing palliative care at the end. We need to have that to ensure people can make that choice.

I wonder if the member could share her thoughts on what the government ought to do to boost its efforts in this area.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, my condolences to the member and her family on their loss.

This continues from what I have been saying, but I think it is important for us as opposition members to continue to hold the government accountable on some of these promises and initiatives. We hear great things in some of the speeches of members opposite, and in the throne speech, but we need to see the action in the legislation that correlates. I will certainly do all I can to push for better palliative care across this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Fredericton for her comments.

My question is very simple. What would she like to see added to this bill? Does she think the bill goes far enough? How could we improve it to enhance the quality of end-of-life care for people who need it?

[*English*]

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, for me, one of the key issues that has been brought forward by constituents is the concept of irremedial mental illness and how this might impact people's ability to follow through with their wishes.

As an advocate for mental health supports, it is such an important question and I want to be really careful and clear. As I mentioned, co-occurring disorders often exist, and that should not be a reason for someone to not be able to pursue dignity in death when experiencing another physical illness. It is a very specific issue, and I hope to see that addressed and the legislation changed.

Government Orders

• (1615)

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to speak in the House today on Bill C-7, the medical assistance in dying act. This legislation was previously introduced in Parliament back in January, and I had the privilege of speaking to it in February. The bill died with prorogation, which occurred so that the Liberal government could avoid questions about the WE scandal. This bill would amend the original MAID legislation from 2016.

MAID is a very touchy, personal and non-partisan issue, and everybody has different views on it. I have asked my constituents and most of them are opposed to this legislation. I am opposed to it and, therefore, will not be supporting it.

The question arises as to why we are here today. I believe there are two examples of Liberal inaction that have brought us to this point. The first is that a judge in Quebec struck down the reasonably foreseeable portion of the bill, which is commonly known as the Truchon case. Typically, in a case with such profound and life-altering consequences for Canadians, the federal government would appeal such a decision from a lower court, but in this case it chose not to do that. It is an example of the inaction that has led us to this place. The government should have appealed it to get a ruling from the Supreme Court.

A second example of inaction is the legislative parliamentary review that was scheduled for this past summer. Obviously, COVID threw a monkey wrench into that, but we have more or less figured out how to live with COVID and get things done, so there is really no reason why that parliamentary review could not be ongoing. However, because of the Liberal inaction on that, the review has not happened.

What is the real reason for this inaction? I believe the current justice minister voted against the legislation originally, back in 2016, not because he did not agree with the legislation but because it did not go far enough in his view.

The Liberal government talks about consulting with and listening to Canadians, but the truth is that it has its own agenda and wants to push that. The truth is that it did not want the parliamentary review. It wanted something that was less. The truth is that it had its own agenda and simply wanted to implement it. The Liberals will talk about the consultations they had with different groups and the fact they had over 300,000 responses to their website and polls, but a consultation is a very different thing from a parliamentary review. Consultations are easy to manipulate. They can be ignored. They provide cover for answering the question, "Did you consult with people?", as the government can say that it did. However, that is very different from a parliamentary review.

That is why we are here. It is the Liberal government's agenda. It is not about listening to Canadians so much.

What do I think about this legislation? Let us start with my constituents. In January, I sent out a mailer and since then my office has received over 400 contacts on this issue through phone calls, emails and letters. Two-thirds of those contacts are opposed to the legislation. I also received a lot of feedback on the rights of health care workers, asking if they have the right to say no to euthanizing

someone. As this is an issue of conscience protection, are they free to not participate? Are they free of penalty or harassment?

Also, the conscience objection of institutions is another thing that must be protected, because an institution is far more than bricks and mortar. An institution is made up of the people and the values of those people who are invested in that institution.

Right here in Saskatoon we have St. Paul's Hospital. It is a Catholic hospital managed by the Catholic bishops of Saskatchewan. In our province, hospitals are allowed to choose which services they wish to perform. This hospital operates on the basis of the Catholic faith and has chosen to not perform MAID. The hospital respects a patient's right to choose, however, so if a patient wishes to have MAID, it will help transfer that patient to another hospital.

Instead of MAID, St. Paul's is very well known for its amazing palliative care. In fact, it is the only location in the city. My own mother-in-law was a patient there. In her case, MAID was not requested nor desired and she was fortunate enough to get one of only 12 palliative care beds in the city. She received amazing care as she came to the end of her life. Notice I said 12 beds. Since she has been in there it has added 13 more, so there are 25 palliative care beds for all of northern Saskatchewan, which just is not enough. In fact, 70% of Canadians do not have access to palliative care. I would hope that lack of palliative care would not force people into MAID as their only option.

• (1620)

I would also note that St. Paul's Hospital built its existing and new palliative care facilities all on its own and raised all the money to build the units. Is this not exactly the behaviour that we want to encourage? However, now, because of the lack of conscience protection, the hospital is being sued by activists to provide MAID. A hospital well known for amazing palliative care is forced to defend itself in court because it will not provide euthanasia.

I think that several Supreme Court cases are instructive here. In 2015, in the Loyola case, the court said, "Religious freedom under the Charter must therefore account for the socially embedded nature of religious belief, and the deep linkages between this belief and its manifestation through communal institutions and traditions." In another 2015 decision, the Supreme Court said, "A neutral public space free from coercion, pressure and judgment on the part of public authorities in matters of spirituality is intended to protect every person's freedom and dignity, and it helps preserve and promote the multicultural nature of Canadian society."

We must respect the multicultural nature of Canadian society. We must respect both medical professionals and institutions, and allow them to have full conscience protection free from harassment and consequences.

As I said, MAID is a very touchy, personal and non-partisan issue. One can always find examples of people for whom MAID is a difficult but welcomed option. Unfortunately, those simple examples are the minority. Most often, it is far more complicated than that. The stories I have heard reflect these complications. I have heard of cases where families are caught by surprise and forced to deal with the aftermath, cases where a person is at a particularly low point in their health but under the legislation before us would be able to request and receive MAID with no waiting period, and other cases where physicians or hospital officials apply pressure on individuals to consider MAID.

I am concerned about the removal of the waiting period. Canadians with serious illness could receive a lethal injection on the same day they receive their diagnosis. I am concerned that people, in a time of very high stress, will make a life-ending choice. Many provinces have a cooling-off period for the purchase of something major, whether it is a car, appliance or something like that. A cooling-off period is there to prevent one from making a terrible decision. Does it not make sense to provide a cooling-off period before MAID? I mean, this is the most significant decision that a person could make.

Of course, there are specific cases where a waiting period is not required, but the current legislation already allows doctors to waive this waiting period. During COVID, we shut down our economy on the advice of doctors. Surely we can trust doctors to waive cooling-off periods if it is required.

I am very proud of our Conservative Party. The vote on Bill C-7 will be a free vote and not a whipped vote. Each of us Conservative MPs will be able to vote our conscience and, once again, I am going to be sending out a mailer at the end of this month to ask the people of Saskatchewan West for their opinions. I will make sure that the House knows those results at third reading.

I am reminded of something that a constituent told me back in February. He said that we needed to slow this down, not speed it up. I agree with him. Yes, we need to deal with the Quebec court decision, but that only requires one change. Let us wait for a proper, legislated parliamentary review. Let us have a pan-Canadian strategy for palliative care. Let us put full conscience protection in place for physicians and health care professionals. Let us put conscience protection in place for institutions, and let us leave the 10-day waiting period and the ability to create exceptions the way it is right now.

I would like to slow this down.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned palliative care in his speech and how the majority of his constituents are not in favour of MAID per se. Does the member believe that palliative care in itself is a form of MAID?

• (1625)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, MAID is a very specific thing. Palliative care is a very different thing. Palliative care is nat-

Government Orders

ural. Palliative care is something that enhances the end-of-life position for a person.

The real issue with palliative care in Canada is the fact that 70% of Canadians do not have access to it. I believe there is a place for MAID in Canada, for sure, but I also believe that, as much time as we spend on that, we should spend even more on helping Canadians have access to good palliative care so that they have good options and a good way to live out the last days of their lives.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech raised some concerns for me, particularly regarding terminology. When the term "euthanasia" is used, some specialists mean physician-assisted suicide. It is important to distinguish between suicide and medical assistance in dying. It seems to me that certain moral considerations are polluting the debate. As legislators, we have to put our obligation to respect individuals' choices ahead of these moral considerations.

Does my colleague not think we are limiting people's choices when we bring these moral considerations into play?

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important point and I think it is at the heart of my concern about conscience protection. I believe different medical professionals and different individuals all have different opinions based on their backgrounds, faith and beliefs. We need the ability to provide the services Canadians want and need, but we also need protections for people for whom issues like this go against their conscience so that they have full protection in law not to be forced to do something that would go against their rights. It is very important that we allow for people for whom this is a conscience problem to have protection in law.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member called this a touchy issue and gave examples of people he had spoken to who oppose it. However, 300,000 people responded to the survey about this issue and a large majority, 86% of Canadians, support the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Carter v. Canada*, which recognizes medical assistance in dying as a right. Seven in 10 Canadians, 71%, support in some way the removing of the reasonably foreseeable requirement from the assisted dying legislation. Most Canadians know someone who has been affected by intolerable suffering at the end of their life. This bill would provide dignity to those who would not otherwise have it.

When the member talks about slowing down the legislation, how does he respond to people who do not have the time or who would live out their last days in intolerable pain?

Government Orders

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, this legislation does not provide that. The current legislation provides that. This legislation is simply changing and modifying the existing legislation. All of the things the member mentioned are in existence with the current legislation, with the exception of the reasonably foreseeable part. I do not have any disagreement with that. My disagreement is with the 10-day waiting period. I would like to see stronger protections of conscience, and I would like to see more focus put into palliative care.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to speak to Bill C-7, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding medical assistance in dying. As parliamentarians, it is so important that we are mindful that the decisions that are made in this place have a real-life impact on Canadians, and the life-and-death implications of this particular legislation only make it more important that we approach it with great seriousness and sensitivity.

I approach this subject through the lens of placing tremendous value on every single person's life, and through my own deeply held conviction that every life is valuable and worthy of protection until the point of natural death. As demonstrated throughout this debate, we, as members of Parliament, hold diverse opinions on this subject and many of us approach it with deeply held convictions. The diversity of viewpoints is undoubtedly a reflection of the diverse views among Canadians.

Where I hope we can at a minimum find common ground, is on the importance of protecting vulnerable Canadians. That is why, to me, it is so important to have the opportunity to speak to this legislation: If that is our shared goal, there are significant areas where this legislation misses the mark.

This legislation takes many steps to broaden the eligibility for medical assistance in dying and removes safeguards that were previously put in place. While I recognize that this legislation is in response to the Quebec Superior Court decision in the Truchon case, the legislation introduced by the current Liberal government goes much further than the court decision required. We know that many Canadians were disappointed that the Liberals chose not to appeal the Quebec Superior Court decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. Among those who were vocal in their plea to the justice minister to appeal it were physicians from across Canada and many advocacy groups for Canadians with disabilities.

It is disappointing that the decision was not appealed, but perhaps it is even worse that the Liberals took this opportunity to make significant changes to the legislative framework of MAID prior to the mandated parliamentary review. The medical assistance in dying law that came into effect in 2016 required a parliamentary review of its provisions and of the state of palliative care in Canada. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this review was scheduled to start this summer. The significant changes proposed in Bill C-7 undermine the parliamentary review that has yet to commence. They also undermine our ability as parliamentarians to review changes to MAID with the full knowledge of a comprehensive review.

The Truchon decision struck down the “reasonably foreseeable natural death” criterion, but in considering the proposed legislation we are also considering many legislative changes outside the scope

of that decision. We are putting the cart before the horse by forging ahead with fewer safeguards when the personal experiences shared, and the concerns raised by Canadians and relevant stakeholders, should give us all reason to pause in loosening safeguards.

We, as parliamentarians, have a responsibility and a duty to ensure that medically assisted deaths are not driven by lack of access to palliative care or by economic or social vulnerability. Ensuring adequate access to health care services and supports should be our number one priority. Palliative care is a main component of that. Through pain management and psychological, emotional and practical support, palliative care helps to reduce suffering and improves the quality of life for a person with a life-limiting illness. Ongoing gaps in access to, and quality of, palliative care in Canada need to be addressed. With an aging population, the demand for palliative care is increasing. As it is, there are not nearly enough health care providers who specialize in palliative care. If the existing gaps are not addressed, they will only grow.

A 2018 report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information found that while 75% of Canadians would prefer to die at home, only 15% of Canadians had access to palliative care or home-care services. Quality palliative care offers an individual facing a life-limiting illness dignity in living.

● (1630)

In addition to palliative care, we should also be looking at access to, and the quality of, other supports like long-term care, disability support and counselling. If we cannot first ensure dignity in living, there cannot be dignity in dying.

We know that medically assisted deaths are most common among seniors. While that might be expected, given the realities of aging, we must also acknowledge the potential for vulnerabilities. We owe it to Canada's seniors, who have helped build and shape this country, to ensure that they are cared for in their older years. We know that it is families and friends who most often take on the caregiving role. In fact, when options like palliative care are unavailable, caregivers step up to support them.

We need safeguards in place to ensure that seniors are not choosing medically assisted death because they feel like they are a burden on the health care system or a burden to their friends or their families. Ultimately, the best safeguard we can put in place to protect vulnerable seniors is to ensure that they have adequate and appropriate supports for a good quality of life. Without these, there is no real choice.

To help ensure that seniors, and any individuals for that matter, are not led to choose MAID out of concern that they are a burden, it is important that they do not feel pressured to do so. First-hand accounts from Canadians who have had medically assisted death suggested, without them seeking it, are extremely troubling. Offering MAID to someone who has not sought it sends a message. When a person is at a low point or in a fragile state of mind, prompting them to pursue MAID may suggest to them that their life is less valuable or has lost value. It might also suggest that they are a burden to society or to their family.

As legislators, we should be looking to ensure that no person is counselled or pressured into MAID. Unfortunately, the legislation before us takes a step further away from ensuring that, perhaps unintentionally. It does this by no longer requiring that there be two independent unpaid witnesses. If passed, it would require one single witness. This independent witness could also be a paid personal or health care worker. This leaves the door open for individuals to be presented with the option of MAID unprompted, in the presence of no other witnesses.

The same individual who counsels a vulnerable person to consider MAID could also serve as one of their independent witnesses. In a vulnerable state, a person could easily be made to feel that they are a burden, and that prompting could lead them to feel pressured to end their life. With the absence of a second witness, this decision could be made without the knowledge of the individual's family.

The proposed legislation also significantly broadens eligibility by allowing for advance consent. Advance consent would allow a medical practitioner to proceed with MAID without a person's consent immediately before administering it. While consent is deemed invalidated if a person demonstrates, by words or gestures, refusal or resistance to a procedure, this assessment is solely up to the practitioner administering it. This leaves space for errors. By solely placing that responsibility on practitioners, it does them a disservice, just as the absence of conscience rights for health care workers in the existing or proposed legislation does them a disservice as well.

There is a finality to death. We cannot afford to leave room for error. As legislators, we have the responsibility to think about how every individual will be impacted by this legislation, because every life is valuable. We have to be mindful of not reinforcing negative stereotypes about illness, age or ability. We cannot undermine suicide prevention efforts or devalue human life. We have to ensure that meaningful alternatives to MAID not only exist, but that they are readily available. Above all, we have to first ensure the protection of vulnerable Canadians. We cannot allow individual autonomy to outweigh their protection.

• (1635)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her contribution this afternoon.

Earlier in her speech, she talked about our role as members of Parliament. I wonder if she could comment on the role of the court systems that are also looking at legislation we put forward, and then ruling on it when it comes back to us for review, and looking at how we could make our legislation align with the court systems that we have in Canada.

Government Orders

• (1640)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, this goes back to a speech I gave in this place earlier today, about not rushing things and making sure we take the time to listen to Canadians, stakeholders and experts.

Another good point that I mentioned in my speech is that there was supposed to be a review. The review has not happened. The Liberal government is bypassing that altogether.

Absolutely, COVID-19 has happened and things have changed a bit, but the review could have at least been started so that this legislation could then be tabled.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I wonder if we are wasting our time today.

Yesterday, we were talking about conversion therapy, a file Quebec has been a leader on, but still has to wait for Ottawa. We are always trailing behind Ottawa because we are always waiting for Ottawa to get moving and get on board. Today we are talking about medical assistance in dying because a decision was made in Quebec, which is ahead of the curve there too. We have come back to Ottawa to work on this file again. If Quebec were independent we would not be wasting our time duplicating our work on these types of files.

I want to come back to my colleague's speech. Legislators did not do their job when it comes to former Bill C-14 on medical assistance in dying. That is why we are here today. We have to come back to this file because the Bloc Québécois's proposed amendments in 2016 to avoid bringing the courts into social and political issues were rejected. We are coming back to it today because a decision was made by the Quebec Superior Court.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about people who have a serious irreversible illness and are essentially forced to go to court. These people are already sick and have to fight the system to be able to access medical assistance in dying. Sometimes they even have to go on a hunger strike to be heard.

My colleague talked about dignity earlier. Does she see any dignity or humanity in putting people in this position?

[*English*]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, this goes back, again, to the fact that these matters cannot be partisan. These are matters of conscience. We need to be hearing from our constituents and making sure that our conscience is also reflected.

Government Orders

We cannot be bringing forward amendments and having them just be shut down because we are not from the governing party. We need to work together.

I believe every life has immense value. If we put funds and resources into palliative care, we could be in a different situation.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, have had several reflective conversations with constituents around the proposed legislation. I believe that we need to have thoughtful safeguards in place. I believe that the proposed legislation includes those.

My question is for the hon. member. I understand that a strong majority of Canadians support the direction this legislation takes us in. Notwithstanding the concerns the member has heard, I wonder how she understands that support among a majority of Canadians.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, I believe that in order to have dignity in living, we need to be able to have the choice. If medical assistance in dying is going to be an option that is readily available, and doctors or counsellors are prompting patients or clients to receive that, we should have adequate funding in our hospices and for palliative care, so that people can have choices at the ends of their lives.

• (1645)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Vancouver East, Housing; the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, Telecommunications; the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, Indigenous Affairs.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate today on Bill C-7, an act to amend the Criminal Code. Specifically Bill C-7 would amend section 241 of the Criminal Code, the provision that makes it illegal for a person to help someone else commit suicide. This section of the code was amended by the last Parliament in response to a Supreme Court of Canada decision in 2015, the Carter decision.

Bill C-14, a 2016 bill, stated that one of its objectives was, “permitting access to medical assistance in dying for competent adults whose deaths are reasonably foreseeable strikes the most appropriate balance.” I would agree with that. The relevant operative provision in the act then sets out the criteria for determining whether a person qualifies for MAID, including that with respect to that person “their natural death has become reasonably foreseeable, taking into account all of their medical circumstances.” However, all of this is about to change if the government has its way with the current draft legislation, Bill C-7.

I am speaking to that bill because I have been encouraged by many of my constituents. Admittedly I have received some letters in support of the government's initiative to expand the reach of MAID, but the vast majority have encouraged me to speak in favour of leaving the law as it is or further restricting access to MAID.

The correspondence I have received in favour of keeping up the safeguards fall into two categories. First, the reasonably foreseeable death safeguard should stay in place. Second, more should be done

to expand palliative care services. It was pointed out to me by many that many seniors and other people with serious diseases did not have good ready access to adequate palliative care.

I will quote Rebecca, one of the letter writers, “Let Canada be a society that is known for its modern and advanced palliative care services and not as a country that has ever-expanding use of MAID.” As a proud Canadian, I agree with that statement.

What is behind the current Bill C-7 is the 2019 Quebec Superior Court decision in Truchon. The plaintiffs in that case challenged the constitutionality of the then three-year-old law, arguing that their charter rights had been violated. The federal government, acting through the Attorney General's office at that time, did the right thing. It defended the law, which is what we would expect an Attorney General to do for Canada's laws.

The AG argued as follows, setting out the three main objectives of Bill C-14, which are still relevant today or at least they should be.

First, it is important to affirm the inherent and equal value of every person's life and to avoid encouraging negative perceptions of the quality of life of persons who are elderly, ill or disabled. Second, suicide is a significant health issue. Third, vulnerable people must be protected from being induced in moments of weakness to end their lives. I think we would all agree with that.

However, the Quebec court did not. It refused to accept the first two principles as representing the objectives of the law. It said, “the Court cannot accept the two first objectives advanced by the Attorney General regarding the affirmation of the inherent and equal value of every person's life and the importance of preventing suicide.”

Having thrown aside those principles, it was easy for the court then to decide that the law needed to be changed. Remarkably, the current Attorney General did not appeal that decision. Instead the Liberals are now hastening to amend the legislation to eliminate the reasonable foreseeability of death safeguard.

With the reasonable foreseeability of death safeguard down, this is what we now have left. First, the applicant for MAID has a serious and incurable disease, illness or disability. Second, they are in an advanced state of decline. Third, their psychological or physical suffering is intolerable to them, which is completely a subjective test.

For example, people with Parkinson's, or MS or quadriplegic patients would check off all those boxes. If they had psychological suffering on top of that, they would be eligible for MAID.

• (1650)

Under this new regime, if it becomes law, people who are not dying but who meet all the other criteria will satisfy the requirements for state-sanctioned assisted dying.

I want to reiterate what Rebecca from my riding said. She said, “Let Canada be a society that is known for its modern and palliative care services and not as a country that has ever expanding use of MAID.”

I know the law will be amended. It must be to satisfy the Truchon decision. However, I will point out four things that I hope the committee will take into consideration in improving Bill C-7.

My first point is that the 10-day reflection period for the track one patients, those whose death is reasonably foreseeable, should come back. It should be there. That was not a requirement of Truchon and I do not believe that Bill C-7 is improved by taking that 10-day reflection period out. For track two applicants for MAID, people whose death is not reasonably foreseeable, there is a 90-day reflection period, and I agree with that.

The second point I want to make is about the 90-day reflection period. I agree with it, but the wording is inadequate. I would recommend to the committee that it amend the 90-day reflection period clause to be the same as the 10-day reflection period clause, but with the necessary change in wording.

My third point is that Bill C-7 would reduce the number of witnesses required for a patient's written directive for MAID. There is absolutely no requirement for that at all and it is certainly not an improvement. Many of the legal documents, including last wills and testaments, require two witnesses as a safeguard against coercion and that should be maintained.

The fourth improvement is that the provision in Bill C-7 saying that a patient's request for MAID must be voluntary without coercion should be expanded to prohibit the attending physician or other health care professional from being the first to raise the availability of MAID option. MAID should never be presented as just another option because in some circumstances, that in itself, would be coercive.

When Bill C-7 was first introduced into the House back in January, COVID-19 had not hit us yet. Since then, many seniors have died of this virus and many others are in isolation. I have seen first-hand the devastating effect isolation has on the mental and physical well-being of seniors, my father-in-law included, as it would for any person. We are created to be social creatures after all.

As my constituent Sarah told me in a very thoughtfully drafted, “[Bill C-7] will put many elderly Canadians, isolated and lonely in their long-term care homes, at greater risk of being considered eligible for MAiD. That is not how we should be caring for our seniors!”

Let us use our experience with COVID-19 as a lens to have a very careful review of this draft legislation to reconfirm our commitment to value life and to build as many safeguards as we can around our most vulnerable citizens.

• (1655)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since November or December of 2015, there has been a great deal of debate on the important issue of medical assistance in dying. At the beginning of 2020, a massive input was solicited. We received input from Canadians in all regions of the country, over 300,000 Canadians. There has been ongoing consultations, discussions and debates over the last number of years.

Government Orders

The bill before us is because of a court ruling. After the legislation has passed, it does not prevent us from continuing discussions on this. I wonder if the member would recognize that this is something we are not only being compelled to do, but in fact it is the right thing to be doing at this time.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, I realize and confirm that we are being compelled to do this. Sadly, that is true. The Attorney General, in my opinion, should have appealed the Truchon decision. It should have gone to the Supreme Court of Canada. It would have been given a very fair hearing there and it also would have given Parliament the opportunity to review the legislation as we were scheduled to do.

As for consultations, I do not think any consultations would forestall us from putting in the safeguards that I am suggesting, the 10-day reflection period, keeping the two witnesses in place and clarifying some of the language around the—

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, in his presentation my colleague regrettably confused two concepts, and in doing so, has made it difficult for parliamentarians to have a clear picture of medical assistance in dying.

First, he confuses medical assistance in dying with suicide. In my opinion, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem, which is a phrase we often hear. A person who commits suicide is someone who may have a future but who, unfortunately, commits a fatal act in a moment of despondency. That is not the case for those who resort to medical assistance in dying.

Even more significant is the troublesome confusion of medical assistance in dying with palliative care. Palliative care already exists in our health care system. If it were better funded, we might perhaps have access to better palliative care. However, I believe that medical assistance in dying has nothing to do with palliative care.

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, I will start with the second question first. I agree that more money and resources should go to palliative care. People should be given a real choice. If the choice is between intolerable suffering or seeking medical assistance in dying, that is not a real choice.

As for conflating medical assistance in dying with suicide, the point that I was making was that Bill C-14 amended section 241 of the Criminal Code, which is the provision dealing with suicide.

Government Orders

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, very few subjects in federal politics are more sensitive than the one before us today as parliamentarians. Of course, this all comes from the Carter decision by the Supreme Court of Canada that Canadians had a constitutional right to access physician-assisted death. Therefore, our job is to craft the best possible system to facilitate that right while we ensure there are the proper protections.

My question is about one of the challenges created by the current medical assistance in dying legislation, which is the requirement for final consent at the time assistance is rendered. This sometimes forces those already assessed and approved for medical assistance in dying to make a cruel choice when faced with the possible loss of competence that would then make them unable to give consent, with the result that they are forced to go earlier or risk not being able to receive the assistance they need to avoid continuing to live with intolerable pain.

I wonder if my hon. colleague has some comments on how the government ought to best deal with that situation.

• (1700)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that this is probably one of the most difficult and sensitive questions in this whole legislative framework.

Whose decision is it when it is the right time to inject a lethal substance? If it is not the person receiving it making that final call, whose call is it to decide when the right time is to do it? It is equally difficult the other way.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will read a post by a well-known physician in Ridge Meadows Hospital in Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge. It states, “I personally have had a patient undergo MAID who would have had a very good chance of living for 5 or more years. The quality of care and the decision to administer MAID was very questionable in my view and when I contacted the coroner to request a review was told that these cases are not reviewable by the coroner’s service. Where is the oversight?”

Would the member comment on oversight? A lot of these have been taken off.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good and important question, but there is no easy answer to it. Of course, there is patient confidentiality, so that information would not be readily available to the public because it was a decision that a patient made in consultation with their doctor.

I would say to keep the 90-day reflection period in and clean up the language to make it much clearer so that doctors and other health care providers understand what the guidelines are. Right now it is too confusing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am very happy to be participating in this debate, not because it is an exciting or joyful topic, but because it is nevertheless a crucially important social debate.

The constitutional distribution of power means that we can talk about one issue in both legislatures. I had the immense privilege of

sitting here for 12 years, then sitting in the National Assembly for 13 years, and then coming back here on October 21 of last year. I have had the opportunity to discuss issues relating to same-sex marriage, the subject of a civil union bill in Quebec. When I was an MP, I had an opportunity to talk about gun control. As minister of and official opposition critic for public safety, I debated a gun registry bill in Quebec. When I was an MNA, we talked about end-of-life care and medical assistance in dying. Now I am back in Ottawa, where we are discussing medical assistance in dying once again.

We have heard plenty of relevant arguments on both sides, extremely well-thought-out legal arguments as well as moral arguments.

I do not normally do this in the House, but my speech will be far more personal than usual, because this moral issue is close to my heart.

First, I would like to point out that I am a man of faith. I am Catholic; I was baptized and raised Catholic, but my convictions go much further than that. I do believe that a higher power created the universe, because there is no other way to explain creation other than by that sort of demiurgic form that created the universe. Some have a name for this higher power; others have several names. I think we are all talking about essentially the same thing.

Some people invoke their beliefs, their faith, to say that it is wrong to end a life. I have something to say about that, since it is part of my Catholic upbringing: we should live our lives to the very end, no matter how much we suffer. However, I refuse to believe that the Creator wants his creatures to suffer. I simply cannot bring myself to believe that, first of all.

Secondly, I like to think that if there really is a Creator and he expects certain things of us, then is it not up to each and every one of us to stand before our Creator when we leave this earth and not interfere in other people’s lives and the choices they have to make?

It is not for us to determine the choices individuals make. Life is fair in that the same outcome awaits us all, but it is unfair in that the outcome does not await us all in the same way. In some cases, the outcome is gentler, in other cases it is marked by incredible suffering. In some cases, the outcome arrives more quickly and in other cases, much later. The outcome might be the same for everyone, but it is not equitable for everyone and each and every one of us will have to endure suffering to varying degrees.

I can understand some people saying enough is enough, they have had it. Since the outcome is inevitable, if the person no longer wants to suffer, why would we allow them to continue to suffer and even force them to continue to suffer?

• (1705)

I believe that if our faith means something, it must let us be compassionate. To be compassionate is not to watch someone suffer and relish their suffering because we want them to live it to the end, but, on the contrary, to support them in whatever choice they make. If they choose to leave this earth earlier to put an end to their suffering, which will lead them to this inevitable outcome anyway, I think that our duty as believers, human beings and political decision-makers is to support this person's choice and decision.

That is why, as a believer, as someone born and educated as a Catholic, I call on this faith and education not to oppose end-of-life care and medical assistance in dying, but to encourage it, to ensure that it is made possible. In fact, I believe that our role is not to judge what someone else wants to make of their end of life, but to support them in the decision they make for themselves for their end of life.

I said somewhat the same thing as what I just said before the Quebec National Assembly when I was a member there. When I expressed this opinion at the time, it generated a lot of interest from the bishop of the diocese in Saint-Jean-Longueuil, where I live. Bishop Gendron invited me to dinner at his home, where we ate spaghetti and talked a little bit about all of this. He wanted to understand where I was coming from as a Catholic to say that I was in favour of medical assistance in dying. I told him that I was in favour of abortion for the same reasons. My Catholic beliefs are what led me to be in favour of abortion because, if it is true that the Creator is opposed to abortion, then it will be up to the individual to stand before our Creator and give account when she leaves this world. It is not up to us to judge that woman or to impute motives that will make the already difficult decision of having an abortion even harder for her.

Similarly, I was proud to vote in favour of same-sex marriage in the House. I told my bishop that I could not believe a religion that emphasizes love so much would refuse to accept that people love each other.

Because of my Catholic convictions and my faith in our shared humanity, I believe that we must not judge others' choices, whether we are talking about love lives, terminating an unwanted pregnancy or unbearable suffering. It is not up to us to judge these choices. Our role, as human beings, as decision-makers, is to support these people's choices.

I touched on this at the beginning of my speech and I want to close in the same vein: The people of Verchères, and now Montarville, have entrusted me to represent them, and I have had the immense privilege, during my wonderful career, to be able to speak to certain social issues that are at the very core of what I just mentioned, specifically that we all have an obligation to support others and refrain from judging them.

Government Orders

• (1710)

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the presentation by my colleague from the Bloc Québécois. It is not very often that I find myself agreeing with just about everything he said.

I ask the member for his thoughts on what I am hearing from the majority of my constituents. They support medical assistance in dying but are asking that we look at going somewhat further, with things like advance consent for when people are no longer of sound mind and cannot make a medical decision. I would like the member's impression on whether or not that is something we should be allowing sooner rather than later. Also, how can we get the government to undertake this study immediately?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, because it allows me to address another issue, one that is just as important as what I talked about in my speech.

If one detects early signs of a degenerative disease, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease, for example, should that person not be given the opportunity to indicate in advance, like a kind of living will, what their intentions are regarding how to move forward when they might no longer be able to make an informed choice?

I must say, I am pleased that the government decided to introduce this legislation, because, let's admit it, the previous one was too restrictive and some people think that even this one is too restrictive. Perhaps we should start thinking about expanding it even further, as the Government of Quebec is doing with its legislation.

[*English*]

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our hon. colleague for his passionate speech. I found it informative and extremely emotional. As somebody who was brought up as a Catholic as a young girl, I too feel people should have their own choice as to how they end their life if they are in great pain and suffering.

What would my hon. colleague say to our colleagues on the floor who are having trouble with this bill because their constituents have said it could be used the wrong way to perhaps put people to death who are having some kind of problem? What would he say to those people so they see his perspective?

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, again, I think that is an extremely legitimate concern.

We cannot allow people to be euthanized based on a consent that might not reflect their true intentions. That is why it is so important to bring in parameters and safeguards that allow us to be sure of the person's consent.

Government Orders

Once informed consent is clearly expressed, whether in advance, as I mentioned a few moments ago, or in the present-time situation, I believe we must respect it. I believe this is a legitimate concern and we need these parameters to help us be certain of the informed consent of the person choosing to end their life.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his articulate and passionate speech. I only wish that my French was better so I could hear its full impact. His words about the duty not to judge but to support and honour people's choices had a particular impact.

I had the honour recently to sit with some constituents, and I heard their deeply held concerns about medical assistance in dying. While my party and I support the bill, I wonder sometimes when speaking with these individuals whether at the heart of this is an unreconcilable conflict between beliefs and perspectives when it comes to the end of life.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely believe that, in most cases, apart from the legal arguments, people's reservations about this issue and their resistance to the idea stem from moral arguments. That is why it was so important to me to express my point of view, however humbly among my fellow MPs, which is that I support MAID for moral and even religious reasons, just as I support abortion and same-sex marriage.

I understand why people who oppose MAID for moral reasons have those reservations. They truly believe it is a sin, but that sin, if it really is a sin, is on the part of the individual, who must bear responsibility for it when brought before their Creator. It is not society's or the community's sin; we are not responsible for the choices of others. Each person must take responsibility for their own choices.

[English]

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to present my maiden speech to advocate on behalf of those who cannot advocate for themselves. It is truly a privilege to be a voice for them. Some of them will even be voices from beyond the grave.

I call on my colleagues today to truly stop a moment and hear the *cri de coeur* from those who are still among us and from those calling to use from the next life. They should take a moment to listen to what we here in the House have done to destroy the value of their lives, to exclude them from society and to encourage them to exit the stage rather than wait for the curtain to fall once the final act is finished.

I will begin by introducing members to Roger Foley. As a young man, Roger was a musician and creator. He loved life, and it showed. However, in his early thirties, Roger was diagnosed with cerebellar ataxia, a debilitating disease that has stolen away his physical abilities one function at a time. Roger is now completely reliant on care providers for every necessity of life.

In the summer of 2018, after almost dying from a life-threatening case of food poisoning he contracted in long-term care, Roger was

trying desperately to access funding for patient-directed care to hire and train his own consistent caregiver in his own home, as opposed to living in a hospital or in long-term care with rotating staff who do not understand his specific care needs. Members may remember Roger as the man who recorded his caregivers offering him euthanasia as an easy way out of his suffering. As we heard in the recording, the nurse says, "You don't have to do it in some dramatic manner. You can apply for assisted—you know." The nurse could not even bring himself to utter the word "euthanasia", yet there he was, against Canadian law and all moral and ethical standards, offering a desperate man an easy way out. It was problem solved. However, Roger is a fighter, and even though he was overwhelmingly desperate, Roger decided he wanted to fight this injustice on behalf of himself and all our vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Roger's path intersected with mine early this year at the beginning of my time on the health committee. In preparation for a study on palliative care in Canada and a review of the euthanasia regime, issues that I thought would soon be on the table for discussion, I reached out to him and his lawyer for his perspective as someone within the system. I finally had a chance to speak via telephone with Roger while he was in Victoria Hospital in a private ward getting good care. While not in his preferred setting of his own home, I found him to be very open and engaging. His knowledge of the issue of euthanasia and the danger it posed for the vulnerable was enlightening. Just before we hung up that night, I said to Roger, "I wish you were on the committee because you are so much more equipped to speak to this issue than I am", and we agreed to speak again soon.

Then COVID-19 hit, and Roger Foley's world changed completely. Roger was repeatedly transferred between units where there was little room for lift equipment and insufficient staffing for his specialized care. Living at the mercy of care attendants who are pressed for time was agonizingly difficult. Roger has very little in his life that is in his own control, but one thing he can do is swallow when offered food, with a certain technique. His head needs to be tipped at just the right angle, and the spoon needs to be offered in just the right way. For Roger, the ability to swallow affords him a feeling of independence. It may seem like a little thing to us, but to Roger it means a whole lot.

Government Orders

When the hospital wanted to feed him with a feeding tube to minimize the care hours required, his mental health took a turn for the worse. On May 15, Roger's brother filed a complaint with the ombudsman on Roger's behalf, yet things just got worse. Roger was suddenly informed that he would be transferred to the long-term care facility that had led to his original food poisoning and hospitalization. Understandably, Roger refused the transfer, begging instead, if not allowed self-directed care, to go back to his original unit, where staff knew him and his needs well. The hospital ignored his request, insisting that it was not safe for him because of COVID and that he needed to transfer.

The night before the transfer was to take place, Roger became completely desperate. He had not been sleeping, due to his fear and anxiety of being transferred. He became so distressed that he told his caregivers that he would throw himself off the gurney if they tried to transfer him the following morning. With no hope of help in sight, Roger reached out to his brother. His brother reached out to his lawyer. His lawyer reached out to me.

• (1720)

That evening we spent three hours on a conference call with Roger, encouraging him to be positive, to keep up the faith and to stay the course on behalf of those in the disabled community who would not have his strength and courage. All the while, I was attempting to contact the hospital administrators on another phone to beg them to back down and to warn them that Roger was possibly suicidal and needed them to reconsider for his mental health's sake.

Suddenly, I could hear on the phone in the room with Roger a new voice. The voice introduced herself as the hospital's mental health personnel, there to administer the 10-question suicide checklist on Roger. She began with her first question, attempting to gauge his distress level. Roger told her that he had no intention of answering her questions, since it was her and her bosses' fault he was in so much distress. She tried over and over, and he refused until she finally left the room in a huff.

The House heard me right; the mental health professional was so annoyed that Roger refused to answer her suicide checklist, she left the room and never returned. I was absolutely dumbfounded on the other side of the line, sitting helpless in my office in Langley. All these able-bodied health care professionals were able to leave the room freely. Everyone could leave as they pleased, except Roger. Roger was trapped.

When we finally got some assurances that a trusted doctor would come and talk to Roger, and it encouraged him to try to rest, I hung up the phone, I had no idea what was going to happen in the morning. I was helpless, but not nearly as helpless as Roger. I can tell members that it was with great relief in the morning that Roger had indeed received an intervention through a trusted doctor and was getting proper care and nutrition. However, this event was a life changer for me. It dawned on me that without the help of his lawyer, who stayed on the phone with us the entire time, Roger's story may have ended quite differently. I wondered how many others in the country are at risk under this new MAID regime. How many vulnerable disabled are offered euthanasia when they are at their weakest? I made it my mission to find out.

What did I find out? I found out that Roger's case is by no means an isolated case. We can see this sort of abuse happening across the country. Take, for example, Jonathan Marchand: 43 years old, suffering from muscular dystrophy and living confined to bed in a nursing home in Quebec. He produced a video from his hospital room which he released on YouTube in response to living in long-term care during the pandemic. Jonathan states, "Increasingly, euthanasia is offered as a solution to institutionalization. The idea is if you don't want to go into a long-term facility and die a slow death, then we are going to help you kill yourself. And those ideas are based on false assumptions about people with disabilities - like our lives are not worth living, that it's better to be dead than to have a disability - but it's not true!" He says that he decided that he would not go ahead with euthanasia, but would fight to get out of that place. Jonathan said, "In a world where there will be no empathy for people who need more help, it would be terrible. It would be something out of the nightmare of the Third Reich."

Bill C-7 is an absolute nightmare that is facing disabled Canadians. Many are already afraid to go to hospital for fear they will be treated differently from the able-bodied. With the implementation of MAID in 2015, the community braced itself for the slippery slope ahead. Everyone said they were just overreacting. They said that safeguards were in place and euthanasia was meant to be safe and rare. We jump to 2020, and here we are racing down the hill at breakneck speed. In consultation with the disabled community, they have expressed firm opposition to this bill.

They explain that with the wording of Bill C-7, the Liberal government is proposing to set up two lines. Line one is for the able-bodied, who, in times of extreme distress, will be offered suicide prevention. Line two is for the disabled, who, in moments of weakness that they all endure as life ebbs and flows, will be offered assisted suicide, because their lives are not worth living, they are told. Add to all that the fact that current safeguards have already been proven completely ineffective. There is a complete lack of accountability structures to ensure abuses do not occur, and yet we are being asked to loosen restrictions even more. Where is the palliative care that was promised? Where is the review that was supposed to have happened? What are the Liberals afraid of finding out? Is it that in actual fact MAID has led to coercive deaths across our country, which go on undetected daily?

Private Members' Business

I stand here on behalf of all those who cry out for compassion and dignity as they travel a very tough road filled with complex care needs and physical ailments that require far more from us as a society. I stand here as the voice of Roger in Toronto, Jonathan in Quebec, Raymond Bourbonnais, Candice Lewis, Sean Tagert, Archie Rolland and so many more who we may never know.

“Lean on me.” That is what I want all of us to say here in this House—

• (1725)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are unfortunately out of time.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member sharing her thoughts and in particular highlighting some individuals. Part of this debate, from its origins five or six years ago, was the citations from real people about what is happening in their lives. We have looked at those as well as the court decisions that have taken place, and listened to the literally thousands of Canadians throughout the country who have had the opportunity to participate and provide information. We are talking about hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have provided input.

I believe the legislation before us is fairly good, in that it puts us in a place where the bill can be sent to committee and the member can hopefully get some of her concerns addressed. I am wondering if the member supports the bill being sent to committee, at the very least, to hear some others' thoughts and maybe get some of her questions answered.

• (1730)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Madam Speaker, a recent statement was penned and signed by over 800 physicians in Canada in response to Bill C-7. Only 25 people are required to sign a petition for it to be recognized, so when a document is presented with 800 signatures from experts in a relevant field, the House should pay close attention to what that document says. Let me read—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): My apologies to the hon. member, but the time is up.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC) moved that Bill C-238, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (possession of unlawfully imported firearms), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, today, it is my pleasure to rise to introduce Bill C-238, an act to amend the Criminal Code, regarding the

possession of unlawfully imported firearms. This bill would help make my community of Markham and communities across the country safer places to live. The bill would do that by increasing the mandatory minimum prison time for criminals in known possession of a smuggled gun. It would also make criminals charged with this crime less likely to be released on bail.

To understand the bill, members need to know how community safety in the GTA has changed over the years. That history is something I know very well.

Like many immigrants, I came to Canada and settled in Toronto as a young man. Back in the seventies, I lived in a rooming house in downtown Toronto with five other tenants and the landlady. My rent was \$10 per week and no key was ever issued for the front door, since the door was always left open. There was no crime around my area, and no one was afraid to walk alone at any time of the night. However, over time, Toronto developed some problem areas.

Many years later, I owned several businesses, and some of them were in the most difficult part of town. I was always afraid for the safety of my staff and my customers. Police regularly came to download the security video from my business, since there were many crimes committed in the area.

This is one of the reasons I got involved with politics. I know what it is like to lose sleep over crime concerns. I want all Canadians to feel safe in their community. That is why I am always talking about safety and security.

As time went on, even the bad parts of Toronto felt safer. People worried less about their kids walking home at night and whether they remembered to lock their doors. I would proudly tell people that Toronto was one of the safest major cities in the world.

Over the past five years, that has changed. Gun crime has risen to new highs year after year. What once felt like a safe city no longer feels that way. Shootings are happening almost daily. Even with multiple lockdowns in Ontario this year, there were reports of nearly daily shootings, each more horrible than the last. It is easy to see this trend by following the news. In 2018, the headlines, day after day, were about horrific shootings. It was a record year for shooting deaths. In 2019, there were even more shootings. Things are not getting better.

Private Members' Business

Speaking to my constituents only confirmed what I believed about gun crime. When I go door to door, people tell me that they are afraid. I hear stories of gunshots close to parks where children play. The stories I heard last October, before COVID struck, are the same as what I am hearing now.

I will read some more recent headlines from our local paper. On June 21, it says, "York police investigate incident of gunshots fired at Markham residence". On June 28, it says, "Man found dead behind wheel after shooting, crash in Markham". On September 11, it says, "Police investigate several incidents of gunshots fired in Markham as 'possibly connected'". On October 23, it says, "Second man arrested after shooting in Markham".

The statistics published in the 2019 York Regional Police "Statistical Report" point to a growing problem in York Region. There are similar headlines from the rest of the GTA and across Canada. When I talk with MPs of all stripes, they are on the same page. I think it is very clear that the problem of gun crime is not getting better, and that needs to change.

● (1735)

Last year, I met with community leaders and law enforcement. I asked them what concrete steps the federal government needed to take to make the community safer. The thing I heard over and over at these meetings was that organized crime was behind the shootings, and the streets are flooded with guns smuggled from across the border. Mostly they are handguns because they are easy to smuggle, hide and carry. That should not be shocking news to anyone. Our farmers, hunters and sports shooters are not fuelling a crime wave. The shootings are gang-related, with innocent people getting caught in the crossfire.

The former head of the Toronto Police, my friend Chief Saunders, said last year, "Gun violence is getting worse, there is more access to firearms". He also said that his sources show 82% of the guns picked up by police in Toronto are smuggled into the country.

Ontario's Solicitor General, Sylvia Jones, has said that provincial numbers show that 84% of the guns used in crime are being smuggled into the country. She has said, "We need to actually crack down on that because that ultimately will keep our community safer."

It makes sense. Canada shares the longest undefended border in the world with the United States, and in the United States it is very easy to purchase a gun. Smuggling guns is good business.

Let me quote directly from a CBC article. Superintendent Jason Crowley, with the Windsor police department, says that the appeal of smuggling guns is pure economics. He says, "You will see a gun, a firearm purchased in the States for potentially \$200 to \$300, and they'll go on the streets [in Canada] for \$3,000."

That is a return on investment that is hard to beat, but it gets worse. The industry is so profitable that criminals are even renting these guns. Why sell it for \$3,000, when they can rent out the same gun for \$2,000, multiple times?

I know that some members on the other side of the House may bring slightly different figures to this debate. However, I want to focus on the fact that smuggled guns are being used regularly in the

GTA and across Canada. Many of the bullet wounds that send people to the hospital and the morgue come from smuggled guns.

The problem is deeper than just the guns. When the police catch the criminals using these guns, they end up right back on the street, sometimes within hours. While I know that some people may be concerned about criminals' rights, I want to be clear that criminals do not have the right to terrorize their community. When dangerous people are arrested for shootings and they return to the community within a day, there is a strong message to the community. That message is that people cannot depend on the justice system to keep them safe.

This is not an exaggeration. When I spoke to the police about this, they said it was a problem. Just having someone in jail for a couple of days can help them cool down and put a pause on the cycle of violence. They are not alone in this.

The Premier of Ontario has said, "somebody gets arrested on a Friday night and they get bail and are back out on Wednesday for retribution. That's absolutely unacceptable". Ontario municipal leaders, including the mayor of Toronto, are calling for tougher bail for those accused of gun-related offences and longer sentences for those convicted. There are too many stories of dangerous criminals receiving bail only to commit more crimes within hours.

My private member's bill would help tackle both smuggled guns and dangerous criminals on bail. As members may know, possession of an unauthorized firearm that was obtained in crime is covered by section 96 of the Criminal Code. The punishment is one to 10 years, or a summary conviction. That does not go far enough. My bill will distinguish known possession of a smuggled firearm as a more serious offence.

● (1740)

This offence would come with three to 14 years in prison on the first conviction and five to 14 on the second and subsequent convictions. This charge is comparable to the prison time for illegal firearm importing and exporting.

Private Members' Business

Possession of a smuggled firearm is a serious crime. That is why people charged with this new offence would face reverse onus bail, which requires criminals to tell a judge why they should be let back into the community on bail. This type of bail is already in the Criminal Code for multiple crimes such as hostage-taking, armed robbery or extortion with a firearm. This bill would make sure the punishment fits the crime of carrying around a smuggled gun.

I know there are some concerns with respect to my bill. Normally, with legislation on firearms, people are concerned about the unintended effects: that, instead of the law cracking down on criminals, it would be used to punish hunters who file paperwork a little too late. We have seen this before in the long-gun registry, which cost about a billion dollars but did not seem to make anyone safer. This bill would avoid that. It is only focused on weapons that are smuggled and on known possession.

I know other members will be concerned about mandatory minimums. They believe that taking the decision out of the hands of a judge is wrong and is a question of human rights. Some might consider three years in prison to be cruel and unusual punishment, especially for a first offence. I disagree. People in known possession of a smuggled gun have the gun for a reason. Even someone who hands off a smuggled gun is putting the safety of the community at risk. At worst, they are assisting with a shooting or a murder. I think members need to focus on how criminals are driving away jobs in our own communities. Some of these criminals may be able to turn their lives around, but that will not happen without serious consequences for their actions. Dangerous criminals learn nothing when we slap them on the wrist for terrible crimes. When they are in prison, I am happy to support programs that can give them a better future. Recent attempts by the Liberal government have not been able to get at the root of the problem. This bill strikes at the people who we know for a fact are criminals.

This bill is one of many steps that need to be taken to make my constituents, and millions of other Canadians, a bit safer. I urge all MPs to vote for this legislation and to continue to do the work needed to make Canada an even safer place to raise a family.

If members have any questions about the legislation, we can iron it out at committee.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member across the way for this bill. Regarding the smuggling of handguns in particular, the cost in my riding is beyond description. It is not just members getting caught in the crossfire: the ricochets impact communities right across the GTA and across the country, so I am pleased to stand and speak to this. I look forward to supporting it personally, even if my party does not. I promise that. We have to stop the illegal importation of handguns into this country, and we have to do it as quickly as we can.

My question for the member is whether he has secured a guarantee from his party that an amendment that was made to Bill C-71 will not resurface, which is the “Oops, I forgot I had a gun” excuse. There was an amendment moved by the Conservatives in the previous Parliament on Bill C-71 that said if people forgot to declare their handgun they could simply say they forgot it was in the trunk

and get off, which was a loophole so big it would have killed kids right across the country. It was so silly I cannot believe it was even proposed.

Can he assure me that amendment will never see the light of day, and the Conservative Party will back away from the “Oops, I forgot” smuggling amendment?

• (1745)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. I will work on it at my end. This is a huge problem in the GTA and the major cities. In the last five years in Toronto alone, the member's part of the world, there were 2,415 registered shootings, over 1,000 injuries and 236 deaths. This was in Toronto alone. We need to work on it. In some parts of the world people may not understand it.

If I have the time, I have a quick report from the Canadian Police Association, which states:

Front-line police have first-hand experience in dealing with the consequences of increasing gun violence in our communities, and smuggled weapons are a significant source of that violence. Bill C-238—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like to give members the opportunity to ask questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton Manning.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, the bill addresses a very important issue: the security and safety of Canadians, especially in major cities. I hear this from across the aisle too. We know arms smuggling is a big problem here because we have such large borders, and we know it is happening every day.

How is the member's bill going to address the safety and security of Canadians, especially in major cities?

Mr. Bob Saroya: Madam Speaker, there are many issues, and organized crime is one of them. We need to clamp down on these issues for the safety and security of Canadians.

I want to read something from the Canadian Police Association:

Front-line police have first-hand experience in dealing with the consequences of increasing gun violence in our communities, and smuggled weapons are a significant source of that violence. Bill C-238 presents a common-sense solution that will strengthen penalties for those who are knowingly bringing these illegal—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for St. John's East has the floor.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the smuggling does not occur in Toronto, of course, and we are opposed to these handguns getting loose. What about the border itself? What efforts does the member propose to actually stop smuggling at the border? The Conservative government got rid of over a thousand border guards when it was in power.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Madam Speaker, I will finish the quote and then come back to the question:

...we appreciate efforts to provide the criminal justice system with the tools necessary to combat this serious issue. We are hopeful all Members of Parliament will carefully consider this legislation and work quickly and collaboratively to pass Bill C-238.

This is from the president of the Canadian Police Association.

To the hon. member—

• (1750)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Spadina—Fort York.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I saw this on the Order Paper and that it was up for discussion tonight, I literally ran from my office to be here. There is nothing that has taken more lives in my life than handguns. In fact, I have been to more funerals in my riding for children killed by illegal handguns than I have for members of my own family in my entire lifetime.

People only have to attend one of these funerals to have their lives changed forever. For those who have attended a sequence of them, one begins to understand that it is not the cliché that is being buried, it is a victim of so many things that have gone wrong that is being buried. The families who have to deal with gun violence in their communities are traumatized. Literally, the number of children suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders in the riding that I represent, in a couple of neighbourhoods, is exceptional.

I will never forget, after a machine gun was used to terrorize a community, seeing a grandmother pull the shrapnel out of a kid's bicycle that now had a flat tire and hand to me so I could give it to the police just in case they could find the individual who had used a submachine gun in a residential neighbourhood.

The most terrifying thing is that in some of our communities, it is not even the residents in the communities who are the targets, it is just the name of the community that is targeted. The media picks up on it and it further traumatizes and stigmatizes the young people who come from some of these neighbourhoods. At the end of the day, it is young people's lives that are being taken by illegal handguns and it is time for it to end, and to end as quickly as possible.

I thank the member opposite for stepping up. We do not normally see good, strong gun control legislation coming from the Conservatives, but in this case, as I said, I do not need a party to tell me how

Private Members' Business

to vote. My residents have told me how to vote and I will be supporting this bill.

The issue, however, is more than just the smuggled guns. By the time a kid picks up a handgun to shoot or be shot, it is too late. So much of what we need to do as a country and, in particular, so much of what we need to do in the city I represent is to give young people better choices, because when those better choices are there, they make the better choice.

I have seen countless examples of young people who have been steered away from a life of trouble, have been taken away from the justice system, put into restorative systems and literally rehabilitated, to the point where they are leaders in bringing down the level of violence that threatens our communities. They have changed the way young people themselves approach the challenges that some of them face and have taken neighbourhoods that had shootings that were just too many to count and returned them to relative peace.

All it takes is people coming out of prison and recycling themselves into a society that does not give them any options except a life of crime sometimes and we end up with a revictimizing of the victims, a revictimizing of these young people and it starts all over again. There are neighbourhoods that are literally on five-year cycles because of the five-year mandatory minimum sentences.

We can almost predict which community, in five years' time, will have a major bust or sweep through it with guns and other elements of criminal activity involved. We know that everyone will be getting out of prison at about the same time, in about five years' time, and it will start all over again. That is why justice reform, changing the way we police this issue, stopping guns at the border and giving kids better choices are conversations I will never back away from. It also requires us to think differently about guns in this country.

I have a sister who ran a logging and tree-planting crew in the interior of B.C. and on Vancouver Island. I understand a shotgun is used as a tool to keep people, especially tree planters, safe in very remote communities. My family was a farming family back in Australia and I certainly understand that sometimes farmers require these tools in order to keep their crops safe or their livestock alive. I understand that and I have no intention of breaking into that.

I have been to the north with my colleague from the Northwest Territories. I have seen the way country food is harvested. I understand the role that hunting plays in sustaining communities from coast to coast to coast, in particular, indigenous communities, but there is no rational reason for anybody in this country to own a handgun. Handguns are made for one reason, and one reason only, and that is to kill people.

Private Members' Business

They may be needed in the armed forces and policing. Even then I still require convincing continually because I get nervous when I see handguns pulled in policing sometimes. I have been on the police service board, I have been to police funerals and I understand the need to defend people, and police officers have just as much right to go home safely after their shift as any other Canadian.

• (1755)

The culture around handguns is as much what we are trying to stop coming across the border as the politics of handguns and the handguns themselves.

We put this bill in a sequence of legislation that includes strong investments in public housing, strong investments in early learning and childcare, strong investments in youth diversion from the justice system, and strong investments in looking at different ways that sentencing can work to support the re-creation and rebirth of people who have made bad choices in their lives. When we invest in education and jobs, and particularly jobs in racialized communities, the temperature changes. The danger starts to disappear, but it is never entirely gone until the guns are gone.

I have huge problems with any attempt to relax the regulations around guns in this country. I will never back away, as I said, from this conversation. They can put my face on the sides of campaign buses and they can write the hateful letters and terrible emails that are sent when one speaks out against handguns and gun violence in this country. I do not care. I just do not care. I care too much about the people and families in my riding who have had to suffer from bad gun laws in this country for too long.

It is different in rural Canada. I get that, but in urban Canada there is no need, no reason, no requirement and no justification for owning a handgun. Whether it is lost, whether it is stolen or whether it is smuggled, when that gun goes off that bullet does not stop ricocheting in our communities. Families that lost a loved one 15 years ago still walk by corners in my riding and break down in tears. Families that lost a loved one to ricocheting bullets that went through windows, or bounced off bicycles, or went through air conditioners do not forget the sound of bullets entering a living room and do not feel safe in their homes anymore.

We have a responsibility as politicians. We have a responsibility as community leaders. We have a responsibility as neighbours to protect each other from this kind of violence. If this law takes 50 guns off the street, I will support it. If it takes 100 guns off, I will cheer. If it takes 1,000 guns out of our communities, I will be doing nothing other than giving my thanks to the hon. member for the leadership he is providing on this issue.

That being said, we also need to have a frank conversation about mandatory minimum sentences, because we know systemically how they are applied and who they are applied to, and who benefits from justice and who does not when it does not understand context. This is not a plea to be soft on criminals. If someone has picked up a gun and fired it, they are a criminal and will always be a criminal, in my view.

The real challenge, and the most important thing here, is to start to understand that we have an opportunity, a responsibility and a chance to take those bullets, and those handguns, away from our

communities and make the lives of police officers safer, make the lives of clerks of the court system safer, make our communities safer, and make politicians safer as we see guns being used against politicians around the world. We have a mutual obligation to work together.

I know that there are people who have a relationship with their guns because they went hunting with their dad. I know that there are communities that need the long gun and the shotgun for food. I understand the arguments that come and the divide that exists between rural Canada and urban Canada, but I plead with people who come from rural ridings to understand that they have to help us stop burying kids in Toronto. We need everyone's help, and we cannot do it alone, with educational programs or background checks. We have to focus on handguns.

I recognize there are some people who like to trap shoot, just as there are some people who like to throw javelins, but someone cannot throw a javelin in downtown Toronto just because they want to. Someone cannot drive a snowmobile in the winter through downtown Toronto just because they want to. If someone has to have a gun and needs to pursue that hobby, please take it out of our cities. Take it away from crowded environments. Take it away from the nightclubs. Take it away from the back alleys. Take it away from a place where it will hurt somebody, because of the damage that guns have been doing, in particular with regard to who is being buried and which communities are being affected.

People are crying for laws on this. They are pleading with us for laws on this and their voices are being largely ignored in this Parliament. It has to end. It is for that reason that I will be voting for this motion, even with my concerns about the mandatory minimum sentences, because we have to get rid of handguns in this country and I will never back down from that position, ever.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I confirm that the Bloc Québécois will support this bill. We will do so in good faith once again. We believe that increasing penalties for crimes such as the possession of unlawfully imported firearms is the right thing to do.

At first glance, the bill is not creating new rights; it is just saying that committing this offence will result in harsher penalties for subsequent offences. One can hardly be against such a proposal.

However, I believe that we should be cautious on two counts. I said I would vote in favour of this bill, but I keep thinking that we must be vigilant about one thing. Personally, I am not keen on the idea of minimum sentencing for crimes. I think that we should trust our justice system and our judges who are capable of assessing situations on a case-by-case basis.

It is rare to find two cases that are exactly the same. There are always subtle differences. These differences must be taken into account, and judges are usually in a position to do so. Yes, it takes mandatory minimums. We are here to legislate, we want to create a legal framework and we agree on that. However, I do have a caveat. Mandatory minimums are not a cure-all. We must be very careful that we do not restrict in any way a judge's latitude to make important distinctions.

I have another caveat. We must not think that by increasing penalties for the possession of illegal firearms we are addressing all problems related to gun control. The opposite is true. This measure will likely have an impact, or at least we hope it will, since we do not want to create legislation for no reason. Still, the impact will be relatively marginal.

The Toronto chief of police recently said that more than half of the gun crimes committed in his city involved guns that were legally purchased. Illegal guns are obviously not a good thing, but although our own firearms market here, in Canada and Quebec, is subject to some restrictions, it enjoys permissions that must be controlled.

Last spring, on May 1, an order was made, and the Canadian government created a regulation that added some 1,500 types of firearms to the prohibited assault-style firearms registry. At the time, it was argued that assault-style firearms were not meant for hunting. Nobody wants to stop a hunter from bagging a deer every year, but nobody needs a machine gun to hunt deer. Many a good hunter will hunt with bow and arrow. The government does not want to ban hunting, but it says that assault weapons, weapons used to kill other humans, weapons of war, do not belong in Quebec or in Canada. The government therefore decided to ban them by order in the spring. Almost all of us agreed on that.

That being said, we look forward to seeing what happens as a result of this ban. I look forward to it, in any case, since the result will be the mandatory buyback program for firearms. Now, we heard our Prime Minister dither on that, and he spoke about an optional buyback program at one point. Someone who purchased an assault weapon that is now banned would not be forced to bring it back if they bought it before it was banned. The government is removing the teeth from this worthwhile gun control process.

This buyback program must be mandatory, and I hope that the government will soon introduce a bill for the optional buyback program. This must be done through a bill. I have not heard any talk about that yet. However, I invite our Liberal colleagues to introduce one as quickly as possible so that we can work on it and finally have a logical next step. We started off in the right direction, but now it seems we are zigzagging a little. I want us to continue in the right direction. I do not want to see any dithering.

● (1805)

In my opinion, the Bloc Québécois would be prepared to vote in favour of a mandatory buyback program for illegal firearms; in fact, we would like that to happen as soon as possible.

In short, we will support my colleague's very virtuous Bill C-238, noting that minimum sentences are not a cure-all. I still

Private Members' Business

have reservations about that, but I think it is justified in this case. We will support it.

Let me add another caveat. Bill C-238 must not be used as an excuse to not go further when it comes to the mandatory buyback program for the firearms that were banned last spring. That is essential in our society.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am here to speak to Bill C-238, which introduces an amendment to section 96 of the Criminal Code to impose a mandatory minimum sentence of three years for possession of a firearm known to be illegally imported into Canada and five years for a second offence. Second, it would increase the maximum sentence from 10 to 14 years and then impose a reverse onus for bail conditions for those who are charged.

We are very concerned about gun violence in our streets. We have heard descriptions of it from the member for Markham—Unionville. We know about the terrible situation in Toronto in particular. We have talked about it a lot with the member for Spadina—Fort York and the member for Markham—Unionville. We hear about it all the time.

We want stronger laws to keep guns off our streets. There should be much stronger laws and enforcement to prevent smuggling. We are very concerned about this but nothing is being done about it.

We also believe that it is the job of parliamentarians to pass legislation that is consistent with the Constitution of our country. People have talked about misgivings around mandatory minimums. The problems we have with the bill are not simply matters of misgivings. We know there are certainly problems with them with respect to the application of the laws to different individuals. It is also the obvious and well-known idea that racial discrimination occurs with mandatory minimums. It is one of the reasons why there are more Black and indigenous people in our prisons. That has been spoken about many times.

However, the real reason is that it is unconstitutional. The legislation to increase the length of the sentence from 10 to 14 years shows the courts and the judges that these are to be taken seriously and will result in higher sentences. When we talk about section 96 of the Criminal Code, section 95 of the Criminal Code on guns and possession of guns obtained by crime has similar mandatory minimums: three years for possession of a gun obtained by crime, or prohibited weapons that were armed or loaded or had ammunition readily available. Those mandatory minimums were struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Therefore, they are unconstitutional. They have no force and effect. They will not be given effect. We as parliamentarians ought not to be passing legislation that is clearly unconstitutional.

Private Members' Business

What is interesting about the case, *R. v. Nur*, is that the individuals who went to the Supreme Court of Canada had been sentenced to six and seven years in jail. The defence argued that the law was unconstitutional and the court agreed. It threw out the mandatory minimums in that case, but it upheld the sentences for the individuals because they were deemed appropriate. The court also threw it out because there were cases where that sentence would not be appropriate. Therefore, that law was not constitutional.

We have to make laws that are effective but that are also in keeping with our Constitution. In this case, increasing the sentence shows the seriousness of the crime. In fact, by increasing the sentence in Bill C-238, the maximum sentence one could get is up to 14 years. That sentence is higher than the sentence for the smuggling.

The law is a bit odd for that reason. It is unusual to see a law for possession of a smuggled gun to carry a higher sentence than for smuggling itself. However, that is the way the legislation is written. Perhaps that could be dealt with in the committee. The signal it sends with respect to the seriousness of the crime is very important.

● (1810)

To get back to the issue, we want to pass laws that are effective. We want to find ways of stopping gun violence in our cities. We know, of course, that most of the handguns we are talking about come from smuggling, so how do we get them away from the cities? They are not smuggled in Toronto. They are smuggled at the border.

We have seen a few things happen in the last number of years. One is that the number of border guards was drastically reduced by the Conservative government. Over 1,000 border guards were laid off, which was a reduction in the number of members of the CBSA whose job it is to look out for smuggling, and we have not seen any significant programs to tackle that. If we are going to tackle the crime, and if the crime is smuggling, we need to be tackling that crime at the border where the smuggling takes place.

We have not seen any action on that. We need an effective law to actually stop the smuggling, and we need enforcement by officials, police forces and the CBSA to actually do that. We try to stop drugs from coming over the border, and we should be putting an equal effort into ensuring that guns are stopped at the border as well.

In the case of sentencing, of course, it must fit the crime. This is a significant and serious crime, and it is up to the courts to do that. However, if the law we are passing is going to be deemed to have no force or effect, and there is very little doubt that this is an unconstitutional law, then we should not be passing it because it is not going to do any good.

There is little evidence that these mandatory minimums actually act as a deterrent. In fact, we heard the member for Spadina—Fort York talk about the cycle of people coming out of prison every five years and committing crimes again. Obviously, it is not doing any particular good if being in jail for several years is not doing anything other than turning people back out to the streets to commit crimes again.

We have to deal with the root causes of these problems, and they have to be rooted out with the kind of programs that we have been talking about. We also need the efforts by the police to ensure we have less smuggling going on and treat organized crime in a much more serious way.

Another thing that happened in the last five years was that several hundred serious investigations into organized crime by the national police force were laid to one side after the tragic shooting in Ottawa in 2014 of Nathan Cirillo and the subsequent attack on Parliament Hill. Resources from the RCMP were diverted to look out for similar activities across the country, and they were diverted away from the organized crime files they were working on.

In fact, instead of putting more resources in place to do that, they were actually taken away from organized crime files. The result was, and this has been demonstrated, over the next several years gang activity, mafia-style activity and organized crime activity actually increased. There was more access to guns and cash, and that increased as a result of a lack of enforcement.

We have to deal with enforcement. We have to deal with the root causes of gun violence, and we have to make sure we have laws that are actually constitutional. We are members of the Parliament of Canada. We must have respect for the constitution of our country and pass laws that are actually effective and that deal with the problem. Let us do that.

It has been suggested, for example, by the member for Markham—Unionville, that it is effective to have people in jail for a few days after being arrested for these things. Well, that is a very easy thing to fix, is it not? We do not have to put in laws that are unconstitutional to do that. If it is demonstrated that there ought to be a cooling-off period, that could be put into law as well.

Let us find the tools to do the job. Let us try to ensure we have laws that are not only effective, but also constitutional. Let us do the job right, and see if we can work together to make that happen.

● (1815)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon to speak to Bill C-238, put forward by my colleague from Markham—Unionville. I want to thank the member for his work on this file and the speech he gave earlier this evening.

Bill C-238, an act to amend the Criminal Code, would increase the mandatory minimum penalty for the possession of a smuggled firearm to three years for the first offence and to five years for the second and subsequent offences, with a 14-year maximum. It would also amend the Criminal Code to automatically deny bail for these offenders in order to stop the catch and release of criminals, a circumstance that our hard-working police and Crown prosecutors experience far too often. If someone is arrested carrying a smuggled firearm, they would be required to make the argument to a judge as to why they deserve to be let back into the community. Quite frankly, they should not get to go home. They deserve jail, not bail.

Some of my parliamentary colleagues may have issues with the implementation of mandatory minimums, as we have heard this evening. I must echo the sentiment of my colleague from Markham—Unionville. Those in known possession of a smuggled firearm have it for a violent reason and their ill intent is to cause harm or death to another. That is a good enough reason for me. This cannot be tolerated in our society, and the prison time is more than warranted.

Indeed, this type of bail is already in the Criminal Code for other crimes, such as hostage taking, armed robbery or extortion with a firearm. This private member's bill ensures the punishment fits the crime. It is a common-sense approach to addressing real threats to Canadians' public safety.

Unlike the Liberal government, the Conservatives know that law-abiding firearm owners are not the problem. Contrary to Liberal claims about our approach, we know there is a problem, and we are putting forward real solutions to address it. Gun violence affects far too many people in our communities.

We heard the reports from my colleague about the untenable situation in the greater Toronto area. Sadly, on the other side of our country, even in Abbotsford and Mission, circumstances are similar. I personally know too many families who have tragically lost loved ones to gun violence.

The perpetrators of this violence did not go through the Canadian firearms safety program. They did not take the courses required to apply for a firearms licence. They did not apply for a possession and acquisition licence or a restricted possession and acquisition licence. They did not have their background investigated, their mental health checked or their domestic partner consulted. The perpetrators are not subject to the continuous eligibility screening that Canadian firearms licence-holders undergo constantly, where their names are run through the RCMP system daily to ensure that no crimes have been committed. They did not purchase their firearms from a Canadian retailer. We already have a robust gun control system in place that works, and the members opposite need to look at the way we treat criminals.

We all know that firearms laws are much less stringent in the United States. We also know that the border between Canada and the U.S. is the longest undefended border in the world. In my hometown of Abbotsford, B.C., the border is literally a ditch separating parallel farm fields in the two countries. My opa's farm straddled the border, a field on the Canadian side and a field on the American side. As kids, we would hop back and forth for fun. It does not take a genius to realize these two realities are ready for abuse and conducive to gun smuggling.

No matter how draconian the Liberal government gets with domestic firearms regulations, no matter how much they trample on the freedoms of law-abiding Canadians, the reality is that the U.S. is our neighbour. It will always be easier for criminals to source weapons from the U.S. and illegally import them to Canada.

The federal government must act accordingly. In the last election, we heard from officers of the Canada Border Services Agency that they did not have the tools to effectively interdict illegal weapons at the border. Recently, the Minister of Public Safety stat-

ed that his government would be doing more on this issue. I look forward to seeing that progress.

The Liberal government can move rapidly to prohibit Canadians from using legally acquired private property in the middle of a pandemic, doing so because it was politically expedient, but it moves like molasses when it comes to addressing this real issue.

● (1820)

This is an emotionally charged matter, and it is for my constituents, but for that very reason it needs to be addressed in a thoughtful, targeted manner based on real data and not emotion. We owe that to those who have been killed by gun violence and to their families. As legislators we are tasked with the honour and privilege of enacting legislation for the betterment of Canadians. However, that comes with the responsibility to ensure that legislation is sound, that it addresses an actual issue and that it will deliver the results it is intended to.

Part of that legislative process is the opportunity to debate the legislation in this place, at committee and in the other place. Such a debate was not able to take place, however, when on May 1, the Liberal government's order in council turned hundreds of thousands of law-abiding Canadians into criminals. However, Canadians are pushing back. Over 58,000 of them signed a petition tabled by the member for Cariboo—Prince George, highlighting the ridiculous and internally contradictory May 1 OIC and calling for its repeal.

Another 230,000 Canadians signed a petition tabled by the member for Calgary Nose Hill, which also called for the federal government to scrap the OIC and instead pass legislation actually targeting criminals that stops the smuggling of firearms into Canada and goes after those who illegally acquire firearms. This sounds a lot like what we are proposing in this legislation.

Numerous legal challenges against the Liberal government's firearm ban also continue to pile up, arguing among other things that the Prime Minister contravened the Firearms Act when he immediately outlawed more than 1,500 firearms through regulatory decree rather than a legislative process, and that governments cannot use an order in council to outlaw firearms used for sporting or hunting purposes, which would include the vast majority of firearms listed in the May 1 directive.

Private Members' Business

The impact of this ban on small businesses has also been devastating, as if COVID-19 restrictions were not bad enough. With all of these shortcomings, I and my Conservative colleagues are committed, as the government-in-waiting, to engage with difficult issues, to consult with Canadians and to take hard decisions. That is why I solicited my constituents for their input on Bill C-238. I distributed a survey and requested their feedback. Eighty-four per cent of respondents ranked stopping illegal guns from being smuggled into Canada as very important. The remaining 16% ranked it as the second-highest level of importance when it came to their safety and that of their families.

The same high number, 84%, agreed with the bill that bail should be revoked for those charged with the possession of an illegally smuggled firearm. The Conservative Party has a plan to safeguard Canadians' public safety and reduce violent gun crime. Unlike the Liberal government, we would not waste time and money harassing law-abiding gun owners and confiscating their legally acquired private property as part of a virtue-signalling exercise that will have zero impact on reducing crime.

What percentage of respondents agreed with the Liberal approach? It was 5%. The NDP's approach, a carbon copy of the Liberals', received the same level of support, 5%, whereas 60% of respondents agreed with the Conservative Party of Canada's plan.

This private member's bill is just one important component of a broader plan that needs to take place to protect public safety. I encourage my colleagues from all parties to review Bill C-238 on its merits and send it to committee for further study.

• (1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this morning is when I heard that the member was going to be bringing forward the legislation. I had this discussion about conflicting messages. There is a bit of a conflicting message. I want to share with members something that somewhat surprised me when I found out this had taken place in committee.

We had Bill C-71, something with which Conservatives had a great deal of difficulty. From what I understand, at the committee stage, there was an amendment brought forward. I am sure members will see the relevancy to this legislation, because this legislation seems to be at odds with what Conservatives were proposing through an amendment.

In the amendment to Bill C-71, the act is amended and this is in essence what it said. The act would be amended to the following, referencing section 11:

Despite sections 109 and 111, no person guilty of an offence set out in those sections is liable to imprisonment if, in the commission of the offence, the person causes no bodily harm to another person.

Sections 109 and 111 in the Firearms Act refer to deliberately lying in order to get a firearms licence, tampering with firearms licence or registration certificate, operating an illegal firing range, ensuring prohibited firearms are safely stored and, this one I find interesting, penalties for lying to a customs officer about a firearm or for falsifying a customs officer's confirmation document.

They wanted to remove penalties for cross-border trafficking. It seems to me that it makes a reference. The member from Red Deer was one of the members. I am not too sure if the member introducing the bill was at that committee. When we take into consideration some of the previous actions of the Conservatives, one could be a little surprised in terms of the legislation that we have here today.

Canadians are genuinely concerned. As my colleague from Toronto talked about earlier, with a great deal of passion, there are many members of this Parliament who are very passionate because they have directly or indirectly seen the harm of governments' not taking actions that are necessary in order to make our communities safer.

I think, for example, of when the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness stands up and talks about the banning of military assault-style weapons as something that Canadians want to see, yet on the Conservative opposition benches we are constantly criticized for that. It is almost as if many Conservatives are not really understanding the issue that we are trying to address: safer communities. Some of the actions that we have taken as a government, I believe, reinforce it, yet we get mixed messaging coming from the Conservative ranks.

We recognize that smuggling is a very serious issue, and yet Stephen Harper cut hundreds of millions of dollars from Canada border control officers. These are the types of things that send mixed messages, and I think it is because the Conservatives' primary concern is more about spin than it is about—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Edmonton West.

• (1830)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, while I appreciate my colleague's wild tales and inaccuracies about the cuts, I suggest he actually read the public accounts and see that it was the Liberals who had massive cuts. I would perhaps suggest the member stick to the matter at hand, which is—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): That is a matter for debate. Let us let the member finish. He has 30 seconds.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it is about the border and the \$390-million cut. That is a fact. The Conservatives might want to try to hide from it, but to say that it did not have an impact in terms of the services that we can provide at the borders and we are concerned about smuggling, and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canada's housing crisis is rooted in the Liberals' cancellation of the national affordable housing program in 1993. Despite declaring housing a human right in 2017, the Prime Minister failed to back up his words with meaningful action. The commitment from the national housing strategy of building 150,000 new housing units over 10 years does not come close to addressing Canada's housing crisis.

One out of eight households in Canada lives in unsuitable, overcrowded, mouldy, cold or unaffordable housing. Over 235,000 people experience homelessness each year. Veterans, who served our country, increasingly find themselves without a roof over their heads. In Vancouver East, right now, we have the largest homeless encampment in the country. People in the community are in crisis, and we have been calling for urgent action.

For indigenous peoples, the housing crisis should shake any government. More than 80% of indigenous peoples live in urban, rural and northern communities, and indigenous peoples are 11 times more likely to use a homeless shelter.

The Liberals' national housing strategy has been falling well short of major targets. As a substantial part of this strategy, the national housing co-investment fund was to invest in the construction of 6,500 new housing units by the end of March 2020, but we have learned that only 736 new units have been finalized, with finalized agreements, as of February, while being subjected to a complicated and lengthy process. The rapid housing initiative of 3,000 units is a drop in the bucket, when in Vancouver alone we have 2,000 people who are homeless.

With such a dismal record, the Liberal government has resorted to counting partially processed applications. Worse still, the national affordable housing strategy has completely ignored the needs of urban, rural and northern indigenous peoples. The throne speech offers no path forward for an indigenous-led initiative, even though the need for an urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy is in the minister's mandate letter.

As stated by the former UN housing rapporteur, Leilani Farha, Canada is experiencing an increase in homelessness encampments. Renters are left out of the equation. There is no federal leadership for people who cannot afford rent, while big financial actors, who are already stationed in Canada, are poised to sweep up distressed assets.

Jeff Morrison, the executive director of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, said, "that the pandemic has changed everything but has also changed nothing in terms of housing." Urgent action is needed now.

We need supportive housing. We need federal subsidies. We need aggressive measures to ensure additional assets to create new affordable housing stock. We need national leadership to stop the financialization of housing, and we need to maintain the existing af-

Adjournment Proceedings

fordable housing stock. It is estimated that 322,000 units of affordable housing were lost between 2011 and 2016, and the national housing strategy is only providing 150,000 units over 10 years.

These are empty words without the resources. The plan is not good enough.

• (1835)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague has correctly identified the list of the challenges the national housing strategy is addressing. What she has failed to do is understand how it is being addressed. For example, on the issue of doing nothing for renters, there is a \$4-billion program that is cost-shared with the provinces to provide the new Canada housing benefit. It is active in Ontario. We are concerned that some provinces, B.C., for example, have not rolled it out, but there are now rent supplements to support people and prevent homelessness.

In respect to the numbers the member quotes about the housing completions, she is just wrong. I do not know where she is getting her numbers from. I know she asked a very narrow question to the Parliamentary Budget Office, but what she failed to understand is that the national housing strategy also delivers housing with provinces through housing accords, which are now signed with all provinces and territories across the country.

In fact, when we take a look at the achievements of the national housing strategy, what we see is that those units are being built. What I think she is referring to are the completed units as opposed to the ones under construction. While I can see there have been some challenges with COVID, again, her numbers are wrong.

Today's announcement adds another 3,000 units of housing to the housing portfolios of municipalities and, in particular, non-profits across the country. Those 3,000 units are the first installment, which comes prior to a budget announcement that is going to add the second, third and fourth installments. We are committed to ending chronic homelessness.

When the member says that nothing is being done on the urban, rural and northern housing initiative, she is again only partially right. She is describing the problem but not talking about the solution. In fact, there has been a \$225-million increase to urban indigenous housing programs across this country since we took office.

Adjournment Proceedings

We also have increased eligibility, so every single indigenous housing provider has access to the co-investment fund and to the community housing fund. The repairs, construction, acquisition, delivery and subsidizing are being done through a \$55-billion national housing strategy, which as I said, was increased today by \$1 billion to create 3,000 units of housing immediately to help cities deal with the COVID dynamic.

In terms of the challenges, the hon. member keeps talking about a housing program that was cancelled 30 years ago. I have a 20-year-old daughter who was born, went to school and graduated since then. If the member opposite would like to build a time machine and go back in time, she would see me on the front lines protesting the cuts that were made in the early nineties. They were a huge problem. In fact, Paul Martin told me himself that it was the single biggest mistake he ever made in politics.

I do not defend those cuts. Those cuts were wrong, but what I did do, unlike members of the NDP, is join a party that actually was committed to investing in housing, delivering new housing, repairing existing housing, subsidizing existing housing, saving the lapsed co-op agreements, stepping up on the issue of urban, rural and indigenous housing, as well as stepping up on reserves, the provinces and the cities, and directing dollars to the front lines through the reaching home program.

To give an example of how different the NDP approach was to ours, that member ran in 2015 on a campaign to promise \$60 million total over four years to end homelessness. We doubled the reaching home program to \$102 million in our first year. We have now locked it in for 10 years. This year, because of COVID, we increased the funding to the reaching home program. The total we will be spending on frontline services directly in cities just like Vancouver East is close to \$500 million in one year. That is 10 times more than that party has ever promised for reaching home, so if the member opposite would like to build a time machine and go back in time, she is perfectly suited to do that. She will see a much younger version of me, as I said, protesting those cuts.

The difference between the member's party members and ours is that while they are building time machines we are building housing in every single province. We are repairing housing in every single province. We are subsidizing residences in every single province. We have a housing accord with every single province and territory, and now we are moving to comprehensively address the deficit in urban, rural and northern housing because, as she said, it is shameful. I will also add that I have never seen a campaign plank in their platform that ever spoke to that issue.

• (1840)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, what nonsense that is. If the member keeps telling himself and patting himself on the back to say what a great job he is doing, the Liberal government will never solve the homelessness crisis that it created.

By the way, in the last election, the NDP called for half a million units of affordable housing to be built. Where is the government on that delivery? Even as it stands right now, the co-op sector, those housing projects that had their agreements expire prior to 2016, do not qualify for subsidies. Now those individuals and families are at risk of losing their homes.

The parliamentary secretary can brag about all the stuff he wants to brag about, but the reality is this. The government needs to open its eyes and take a look. We have a housing crisis. People are sleeping in tent cities. The former UN housing rapporteur is saying that the situation is worse under the Liberal government.

It is time to get on with—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, again, the member opposite is just plain wrong.

If she wants me to stop patting myself on the back, perhaps I could quote somebody who she will listen to. This tweet was received today:

The announcement day was very welcome and will get out to good use. Thank you for your continued work on housing. Please also champion new powers for cities to help address priorities independently.

That came from a young man who is a city councillor in Toronto. His last name is Layton, Mike Layton, the son of Jack Layton. If the NDP are not prepared to listen to Jack Layton's son, I will search the country for somebody else. If they want me to go mayor by mayor, or premier by premier, or to go to individuals who are homeless in this country, tent by tent, I will tell them what we are doing. I will open my eyes and ears to those conversations.

I will make sure that we do not rest until we end chronic homelessness in this country, because that is the pledge we made in the throne speech. I can only pray that the NDP wakes up in time to support it.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is a digital divide between rural and urban Canada. It is now over five years ago that the CRTC designated broadband as an essential service, yet far too many of my constituents in Battlefords—Lloydminster remain disconnected without access to rural broadband. Canadians in rural and underserved communities right across the country also find themselves in the same situation.

Adjournment Proceedings

Today, in 2020, only 40% of Canada's rural communities have access to an Internet connection that meets the minimum threshold of broadband speeds that have been set by the CRTC. When it comes to mobile broadband, Canada comes up short on connecting all Canadians. There remains no mobile broadband access or inadequate mobile access in too many rural communities and major transport routes.

Five years ago, when the CRTC made that designation, it was already accepted back then that access to consistent and quality broadband services contributed to people's economic productivity and their equality of opportunity.

Broadband services were recognized as necessary to allow for meaningful participation in our digital economy. Now, during a pandemic, the need for mobile access and high-speed Internet connection has only been exacerbated. COVID-19 has moved so much of our everyday lives online. More Canadians are working from home; students are attending classes from home; groceries are being purchased online; government services, like Service Canada, are being accessed online; and many health care services are moving online. With social distancing measures in mind, more Canadians are using the Internet to stay connected with friends and family.

The last point is particularly poignant for Canada's seniors and those who find themselves more vulnerable due to COVID-19. Without access to broadband services, social distancing can quickly become social isolation. The need for mobile and Internet connection for all Canadians is undeniable.

During question period a few weeks ago, I shared David's frustration, a constituent of mine who lives only kilometres from Lloydminster, in the Alcurve area, with no cell service near his home. In a letter he shared with me, David described the hurdles he faced when more and more businesses, even doctors' offices, were using text notifications. He also shared concerns about not having a cell service available to him at his home, with rural crime growing exponentially in the area. This is a very serious public safety concern that I know is not unique to only him.

David and too many of my constituents are being left behind as the digital divide between rural and urban Canada grows. Unfortunately, when the Liberal government is asked about its plan to deliver broadband to all Canadians, its only response seems to be that more Canadians are connected now than under previous governments. That response is not satisfactory and does not give rural Canadians the confidence that the government will meet its commitments or the goal set out by the CRTC.

What is perhaps even more confidence-shattering is the email that my colleague, the member for Perth—Wellington, shared in the House just last week. The email received by him from the office of the Minister of Rural Economic Development indicated that the minister had no levers on the issues relating to rural broadband and had nothing to say on those specific issues. The Minister of Rural Economic Development should have much to contribute to any conversation relating to rural broadband. Knowing how critical broadband access is to the full participation of our modern economy, she should be the strongest advocate for rural broadband at the cabinet table.

The Liberal government needs to ensure broadband infrastructure is available to all Canadians. What is the minister's concrete and—

• (1845)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to respond to the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster about the need for Canadians in rural communities to have access to reliable and affordable telecommunications services.

Our government recognizes the vital importance of broadband and mobile services so all Canadians can fully participate in digital economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced how critical these services are to our economy and society. As a member representing a large rural riding myself, I understand first-hand the importance of getting all Canadians connected.

The federal government has made billions of dollars available to support connectivity and to connect rural communities from coast to coast to coast. Under the connect to innovate program, we are investing over \$585 million to improve high-speed Internet. This program has been successful thanks to collaboration with the private sector, provinces and territories. Our partners have provided significant funding, with investments totalling more than \$1.2 billion.

Connect to innovate is delivering real results, making a real impact across the country. This program will bring improved Internet connectivity to over 975 communities, 190 of which are indigenous communities. This will improve access for approximately 250,000 households by the end of 2021 and will connect 400,000 households in total.

In addition to these households, the program will benefit anchor institutions, such as schools, libraries and medical facilities all across the country. Students will have access to online resources. Workers will be able to do their jobs remotely and access online training. Entrepreneurs will be able to execute their ideas and reach global markets.

We are also leveraging other sources to improve connectivity, such as Infrastructure Canada programs. In March 2019, we announced \$33 million in Prince Edward Island to connect 30,000 homes. In July 2019, we partnered with New Brunswick to invest \$40 million in a fibre and fixed wireless project, which will benefit 83,000 rural households. In July of 2020, we partnered with British Columbia to invest \$1 million in two fibre projects to improve access in east and central Kootenay.

Adjournment Proceedings

Canada's telecommunications regulator, the Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, is also taking action to expand Internet and cell access through its \$750 million fund, which is sourced from an industry levy. In August, the CRTC announced the first five projects under its fund to improve Internet access in northern and remote communities. These projects will connect over 10,000 households in 51 communities. The significant majority of these communities are indigenous. The CRTC will make further announcements for the rest of the country in the months ahead.

Building on these efforts in budget 2019, our government announced historic investments of \$1.7 billion in broadband. It is our country's single-largest investment to advance our goals. Our actions are guided by our 2019 connectivity strategy, which is a road map for achieving universal access all across Canada.

As indicated in the recent 2020 Speech from the Throne, our government will accelerate the connectivity timelines and the ambitions of the universal broadband fund to ensure that all Canadians have access to high-speed Internet. We have been engaging with stakeholders to ensure the fund responds to rural needs and look forward to a program launch very shortly.

We will also take advantage of other measures to promote rural access. This includes investments in low-earth orbit satellites to ensure even the most challenging northern and remote areas—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Madam Speaker, all I heard in that response was that billions upon billions of dollars have been invested in rural broadband and connectivity. That statement does nothing for my constituents. It does not give my constituents confidence that they will have broadband access in the near future.

I mentioned in my remarks that shopping is done online, students are doing school online and doctor's appointment are even done online. With crime growing in rural parts of Canada, it is important that Canadians have access to a mobile connection so they can call the police or call for help whenever they need.

Not that much has been completed, so I want to remind the member opposite that 60% of rural communities still have no broadband Internet.

• (1850)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical need for reliable communication networks to navigate everyday life for every person. Our connectivity investments will be an important part of Canada's recovery.

Through projects and programs approved by our government, we will connect an estimated 1.4 million households. Through the Conservatives' signature broadband program, the projects approved by the previous Conservative government connected just 334,000 homes. That means our government will connect four times more households than the previous Conservative government did. One of those projects is a \$5.9-million investment under the connect to innovate program, which was awarded to FlexNetworks, to bring new and improved Internet to 14 communities from Saskatoon to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

We have a strong track record of delivering results, and we will build on that success as we build a brighter future for rural and remote and all indigenous communities.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to talk about a very important issue facing Canadians from coast to coast to coast. People across Canada have been watching what is happening in Nova Scotia to the Mi'kmaq, to the Sipekne'katik people, and demanding that the government uphold the rule of law to keep Mi'kmaq fishers safe.

All Canadians deserve to be safe and have the security they need. This year has been marked by unfounded and unjust violence against Black and indigenous people in Canada and the United States. What has happened in Sipekne'katik cannot be dismissed as just another event. It must be seen as the act of domestic terrorism and that is what it is.

We can talk about how shocked we are and about how this is not Canada, but for indigenous people and for Mi'kmaq fishers, this has been the reality for generations. I speak about how the RCMP watched things unfold, the burning of a lobster pound, the intimidation, the assaults that took place and the cutting of traps. DFO and the RCMP sat idly. Only two arrests have been made since then. For weeks, we have been calling for the RCMP to bolster forces to provide safety and security to the people there and that has not happened.

I just want to talk about how the response has been different for the Haudenosaunee and the Six Nations. The government showed up with what seemed like a militarized barricade and used rubber bullets on indigenous protesters. I think we are all horrified to be learning of the news of a Secwepemc man near Williams Lake getting literally assaulted by the RCMP just yesterday.

The government needs to get body cameras on RCMP officers now. They need an independent investigating officer, not just for the violence inflicted on indigenous people by the RCMP, but also when charges have not been laid and the RCMP have sat idle.

Adjournment Proceedings

In 1999, the Marshall decision upheld the right for the Mi'kmaq to practise their inherent right to fish. They have the constitutional and treaty right to earn a moderate living and when they attempt to practise that right, they are stopped by DFO and are harassed by non-indigenous fishers. The acts of violence are nothing new and the indifference from consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments remains the same.

In 1999, the fisheries and oceans committee, of which the hon. member for Malpeque was a member, said that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was caught off guard by the Marshall decision and were unprepared to stop violence and have conversations with fishers.

Here we are 21 years later still talking about the Mi'kmaq fishers and their right to a moderate living, and still talking about how to respond to the acts of terror against them. We are talking and talking with no action. It is beyond time the government take its so-called "most important relationship" seriously. The Minister of Fisheries must empower her department to act before violence happens again, ensure that negotiators come to the table with the resources to support that nation so they can accommodate their right to a moderate livelihood and hold people who choose violence to account. I am asking for this urgently.

• (1855)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, whether it is me now, ministers of the Crown or the Prime Minister, I think the government has been very clear in regard to the issue. The government does fully respect and affirms the right of the Mi'kmaq to fish in pursuit of a moderate livelihood. There should be absolutely no doubt about that.

I found it interesting when the member was talking about the relationship. There has been lots of discussion to date on the issue and, no doubt, there will continue to be ongoing dialogue. I think that can be a very positive thing, especially having this issue brought up in the House. It never hurts to do that.

The member made reference to that relationship, and the relationship between the national government and indigenous peoples is in fact a very important one. It has been from day one and even before that. I have seen the Prime Minister's commitment and caring attitude in terms of indigenous peoples and wanting to establish that nation-to-nation level of respect. I have witnessed that in terms of the Prime Minister's establishment of two departments. I have seen ministers go out and do whatever they possibly can.

I can appreciate that it has been 25 years and that it would have been absolutely wonderful to see the negotiations get to a point where they would never hit what we have witnessed over the last number of weeks. Unfortunately, that is not the case. However, it is important that we are very clear that our government has always recognized and will continue to recognize and respect the affirmed treaty rights of the Mi'kmaq to fish in pursuit of a moderate livelihood. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

Also, every Canadian, everyone, deserves to be safe and be afforded equal protection. There is no question that this applies to all Mi'kmaq and to all Canadians.

The member made reference to incidents that have occurred that upset a great deal of Canadians, not only elected officials or people of indigenous backgrounds but Canadians and society as a whole. I have personally received, while representing the riding of Winnipeg North, many emails on the issue. I believe that the government for a long time now has been trying its best to get some sort of resolution to the seriousness of the issue. We have more than two ministers who have dedicated a great deal of their efforts, and the Prime Minister's Office continues to want to see progress on this file.

Whether from seeing videos or hearing indirectly through others about some of the things taking place, I have—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, where I live, the government has spent over \$21 million on lawyers alone fighting the Nuu-chah-nulth over their right to catch and sell fish.

Is this what caring and trying looks like? This is what colonizers, and power and suppression look like. This is what a violation of international human rights looks like. The Supreme Court judge in the Nuu-chah-nulth case, for example, scolded the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for knowingly sending its negotiators to the table empty-handed, disgusted with the attitude of the government.

The systemic racism is so deep that we hear it right now in the House of Commons. Another example is what we are hearing from the member: He is caring and trying, and this is the most important relationship, but we will see them in court. That is what we keep hearing from the government.

We need better. The Mi'kmaq fishers deserve their right to a moderate living. The Nuu-chah-nulth deserve their right to earn a living, and they deserve to be safe. They deserve to have their human rights protected and respected. That is what the government has a duty to do.

• (1900)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the government is doing its duty. I do not want to turn this into a political discussion, but I can cite many faults of the New Democratic government in Manitoba with regard to how it dealt with issues that are really important for indigenous people.

I will make this very clear. On nation-to-nation discussions, I can assure the House and Canadians that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has been working diligently on a path forward. He is having regular discussions with first nations leadership to further implement the rights we have referenced.

Adjournment Proceedings

I remind the House that it was made clear by the Supreme Court that the best vehicle for the Government of Canada to accommodate treaty rights is through consultations and negotiations. However, we all know negotiations take time. As these nation-to-nation discussions have been occurring, the minister recently named a neutral third party representative to help foster an understanding between first nations and commercial harvesters. This is a very—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7 p.m.)

David Braley	
Mr. Dreeshen	1301
Racism	
Mr. Sidhu (Brampton East)	1301
Jacques Godin	
Mrs. Desbiens	1301
A Canadian Vaccine	
Ms. Bendayan	1301
Joey Moss	
Mr. Jeneroux	1302
Leaside High School	
Mr. Oliphant	1302
Nagorno-Karabakh	
Mr. Robillard	1302
Women	
Mr. Berthold	1302
Hochelaga	
Ms. Martinez Ferrada	1302
Suicide Prevention	
Mr. Kurek	1303
Poppy Campaign	
Mrs. Gray	1303
Small Business	
Mr. Johns	1303
Quebec Marine Day	
Mr. Blanchette-Joncas	1303
Saskatchewan Elections	
Mr. Tochor	1304
2020 By-Elections	
Mr. Spengemann	1304

ORAL QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Emergency Response	
Mr. O'Toole	1304
Mr. Trudeau	1304
Public Safety	
Mr. O'Toole	1304
Mr. Trudeau	1304
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	
Mr. O'Toole	1305
Mr. Trudeau	1305
Health	
Mr. O'Toole	1305
Mr. Trudeau	1305
Intergovernmental Affairs	
Mr. O'Toole	1305
Mr. Trudeau	1305

Indigenous Affairs	
Mr. Blanchet	1305
Mr. Trudeau	1305
Mr. Blanchet	1305
Mr. Trudeau	1306
Pharmacare	
Mr. Singh	1306
Mr. Trudeau	1306
Child Care	
Mr. Singh	1306
Mr. Trudeau	1306
Official Languages	
Mr. Martel	1306
Mr. Duclos	1306
Mr. Martel	1306
Mr. Duclos	1306
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. Bergen	1307
Mr. Oliphant	1307
Ms. Bergen	1307
Mr. Champagne	1307
Taxation	
Mr. Poilievre	1307
Mr. Fraser	1307
Mr. Poilievre	1307
Mr. Fraser	1307
COVID-19 Emergency Response	
Mr. Lemire	1308
Ms. Joly	1308
Mr. Lemire	1308
Ms. Joly	1308
Public Services and Procurement	
Ms. Rempel Garner	1308
Mr. MacKinnon	1308
Ms. Rempel Garner	1308
Mr. MacKinnon	1308
Health	
Mr. Paul-Hus	1309
Ms. Hajdu	1309
Mr. Paul-Hus	1309
Ms. Hajdu	1309
Indigenous Affairs	
Mr. Angus	1309
Mr. Miller	1309
Health	
Ms. Gazan	1309
Ms. Hajdu	1309
Housing	
Mrs. Romanado	1310
Mr. Hussen	1310
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Brassard	1310

Mr. MacAulay	1310
Mr. Brassard	1310
Mr. MacAulay	1310
Public Safety	
Mrs. Stubbs	1310
Mr. Blair	1310
Mrs. Stubbs	1311
Mr. Blair	1311
Official Languages	
Mr. Beaulieu	1311
Mr. Duclos	1311
Mr. Beaulieu	1311
Mr. Duclos	1311
COVID-19 Emergency Response	
Mr. Dalton	1311
Mr. Hussen	1311
Seniors	
Mr. Lehoux	1312
Mrs. Schulte	1312
Ms. Shin	1312
Mrs. Schulte	1312
Persons with Disabilities	
Mr. May (Cambridge)	1312
Ms. Qualtrough	1312
The Environment	
Mr. Kitchen	1312
Mr. Wilkinson	1312
Natural Resources	
Mr. Dreeshen	1313
Mr. O'Regan	1313
Mr. Zimmer	1313
Mr. O'Regan	1313
Indigenous Affairs	
Ms. Dzerowicz	1313
Mr. Mendicino	1313
Health	
Ms. Ashton	1313
Ms. Hajdu	1313
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	1313
Mr. Trudeau	1314
Terrorism	
Mr. Bergeron	1314
Motion	1314
(Motion agreed to)	1314

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Criminal Code	
Bill C-6. Second reading	1314
Ms. Petitpas Taylor	1314
Mrs. Vecchio	1314

Mr. Lamoureux	1314
Mr. Masse	1315
Mr. Jeneroux	1315
Ms. Lambropoulos	1315
Mr. Berthold	1316
Mr. Lemire	1317
Ms. Collins	1317
Mrs. Atwin	1317
Mr. Louis	1317
Mr. Fortin	1317
Mr. Lamoureux	1318
Mr. Liepert	1318
Mr. Bachrach	1319
Mr. Simard	1319
Mr. Oliphant	1319
Ms. Gladu	1321
Mr. Savard-Tremblay	1321
Mr. Davies	1321
Division on motion deferred	1322
Criminal Code	
Bill C-7. Second reading	1322
Mrs. Atwin	1322
Mr. Lamoureux	1323
Ms. Gladu	1323
Mr. Lemire	1323
Mr. Redekopp	1324
Mr. McDonald	1325
Mr. Simard	1325
Ms. Collins	1325
Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	1326
Mr. Longfield	1327
Mr. Blanchette-Joncas	1327
Mr. Bachrach	1328
Mr. Van Popta	1328
Mr. Lamoureux	1329
Mr. Simard	1329
Mr. Davies	1330
Mr. Dalton	1330
Mr. Bergeron	1330
Mr. Liepert	1331
Ms. Zann	1331
Mr. Bachrach	1332
Mrs. Jansen	1332
Mr. Lamoureux	1334

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Criminal Code	
Mr. Saroya	1334
Bill C-238. Second reading	1334
Mr. Vaughan	1336
Mr. Aboultaif	1336
Mr. Harris	1337
Mr. Vaughan	1337
Mr. Fortin	1338
Mr. Harris	1339

Mr. Vis	1340
Mr. Lamoureux	1342

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Housing

Ms. Kwan	1343
Mr. Vaughan	1343

Telecommunications

Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	1344
Ms. Hutchings	1345

Indigenous Affairs

Mr. Johns	1346
Mr. Lamoureux	1347

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