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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 25, 2020

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem.

[*English*]

Before recognizing the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar to lead us, I wish to note that this week marks the 25th anniversary of the practice of singing the national anthem before the opening of each Wednesday sitting.

The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the small businesses in Mississauga—Erin Mills, I would like to thank this government for the incredible support provided during this pandemic.

The Canada emergency business account has provided loans to organizations like the Gems Learning Institute, which allowed it to continue providing STEM education for youth this summer. The Canada emergency wage subsidy has covered up to 65% of wages for the loyal staff of Mulligan's Pub. Just this week we rolled out the Canada emergency rent subsidy, covering up to 65% of commercial rent and other expenses for businesses such as Orchid Nails & Spa.

These programs are a vital lifeline for small business owners in my riding and across the country. As we continue to weather the second wave of this pandemic and plan for Canada's recovery, I know that small businesses will continue to be a priority for our government.

RICHMOND CHRISTMAS FUND

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year, the Richmond Christmas Fund helped brighten the holidays for nearly 3,000 of our neighbours in need, including over 1,200 children and youth and 300 seniors, enabling them to enjoy a festive holiday celebration with family and friends. This holiday season, the fund continues to ensure those experiencing financial hardship can share in the holiday spirit.

For the outpouring of generosity, I would like to thank the fund's "Angel Donors" for helping surpass donations and set another record year amidst the pandemic: Platinum Pro-Claim Restoration, Tony Scott; Herbaland Naturals, Aisha Yang and Musharaf Syed; Pacific Gateway Hotels, Eda Koot; Auto West Group, Joachim Neumann; Richmond Auto Mall Association, Gail Terry; TD Canada Trust, Tony Mauro; Patti Martin Real Estate Group, Patti Martin; Stage Foundations, David Sheng and Fanny Lagun; Canadian Tire Richmond, Terry Sanford and Sean Disdero. We thank them.

Happy holiday, happy Hanukkah and merry Christmas.

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[*Translation*]

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, now is the moment of truth. The Bloc Québécois has introduced a bill to prevent any further breaches in supply management.

Farmers are watching us. They saw the House unanimously adopt motions where all parliamentarians supported fully maintaining supply management. When the rubber hit the road, however, these motions were ignored.

They heard the Liberals promise to make no concessions, only to betray them. They heard the Liberals promise to provide compensation, only to put off paying. Now they are hearing the Conservatives make promises, but the Conservatives were responsible for two of the three breaches.

They have seen and heard enough. Now is the moment of truth. Farmers are watching us, and it is time to vote.

It is time to vote for them, like they have been asking us to do. They will know which elected officials they can count on, based on who votes to stop this butchering of supply management once and for all. This will be the test.

*Statements by Members***CADET CORPS**

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Remembrance Day, I met with representatives of Branch 251 of the Royal Canadian Legion and the cadet corps in my riding of Vimy, specifically 2650 Châteauguay, 687 Richelieu, 100 Laval and 784 St-Vincent-de-Paul squadrons.

• (1410)

[*English*]

Across the country, over 53,000 young Canadians participate in the Canadian army, sea and air cadets. These programs allow youth to develop physical fitness, leadership skills and good citizenship.

[*Translation*]

I would like to acknowledge the important work of all cadets in Canada. I encourage all young Canadians to join their local cadet branch. It is an unforgettable experience.

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INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 5, we will mark International Volunteer Day, and I would like to commend volunteers from Alfred-Pellan ahead of time.

There are a great many of them, but to name just a few, we have the volunteers from Cité de la Santé, the Centre d'écoute de Laval and Jeunes Youth Laval.

During the pandemic, our volunteers did not hesitate to put themselves on the front lines to make sure our community remains closely knit in this time of crisis, working tirelessly to support the organizations and vulnerable individuals in my riding. They have brightened the lives of our seniors in their darkest days. They have rolled up their sleeves and worked kitchen shifts to feed those in need. They have given their time to listen to a community in distress so they could make people feel better.

I would like to thank them, our guardian angels, from the bottom of my heart.

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THE HOLIDAY SEASON IN MONTMAGNY—L'ISLET—KAMOURASKA—RIVIÈRE-DU-LOUP

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to commend all chambers of commerce, particularly those in Montmagny, Kamouraska-L'Islet and Rivière-du-Loup for their buy-local initiatives during the holiday season.

Many of my riding's business owners and artisans are not feeling very festive because they will have to make some tough business decisions soon. I would also like to commend the bold steps taken by associations, community groups and foundations to raise funds for those in need.

They are organizing ingenious charitable activities, cooking benefit meals to go, fashioning their own face masks, hosting virtual performances, and more.

Now, more than ever, is the time to show community spirit by rolling up our sleeves and encouraging local business owners, who are the lifeblood of our municipalities. I would like to pledge my support to all volunteers who are preparing meals and food baskets for families that never would have thought they would need to ask for food to meet their needs in these difficult times.

My team and I are here for them. We wish them all a happy holiday season, despite the situation.

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THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to proudly acknowledge the vital importance of the French language to us, to all Quebecers and to all Canadians.

French is a unique and distinguished language. It symbolizes our history and our roots and speaks to our culture, our community and our origins.

French is essential to the survival of our identity and our communities. It is our right to access all services in French, so that we can be well served in Canada in one of the two official languages.

French, the language of Molière, is a wonderful asset for our country. We must not only protect this heritage of our ancestors by defending our language, but also promote it in Canada and around the world.

I am proud to speak French. Speaking French is a great asset. Speaking French is a source of pride.

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[*English*]

ANTOINETTE SCARANO

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, strong communities are possible only with the involvement of selfless individuals who give their time, energy, heart and soul to local causes and organizations. Antoinette Scarano was such an individual. Antoinette's contributions to West Island life were remarkable for their variety and for the long-standing involvement she maintained with the organizations she helped.

Whether as a member of the boards of Light a Dream, Carrefour jeunesse-emploi de l'Ouest-de-l'Île, Action Jeunesse de l'Ouest-de-l'Île, the Ricochet youth homeless shelter project, the West Island of Montreal Chamber of Commerce, or as a work-study coordinator with the Lester B. Pearson School Board, Antoinette was committed to building a more resilient community. The West Island has lost an engaged citizen who could light up a room with her smile and motivate by her example of service.

To Antoinette's husband Renato, daughter Roseann and son Andrew, we offer our deepest condolences.

• (1415)

FRED SASAKAMOOSE

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege today to rise and honour the life of Fred Sasakamoose, who passed away yesterday.

Fred was a trailblazer, becoming the first first nations person to play in the NHL. After his last game of junior hockey, a telegram was read in the dressing room. It said, “Please report immediately to the Chicago Black Hawks to play in the NHL in Toronto on Hockey Night in Canada.” Fred’s words described the story best when he said, “I was warming up on the ice. And somebody skated up to me and said, ‘Somebody wants to talk to you over there.’ I’d never seen Foster Hewitt in my life. He was just on the radio. He said, ‘How do you pronounce your name? Is it Saskatchewanmoose or Saskatoonmoose?’”

Fred went on to be a champion for his people, and his family can always be proud of his many accomplishments. I ask all members to join me today in recognizing the life and the legacy of Fred Sasakamoose.

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OTTAWA SOUTH

Hon. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite all the challenges we have faced this year, democracy is alive and well in my riding of Ottawa South. During the COVID crisis, the local community associations have come together to assist those in need. Neighbours are helping neighbours, looking out for each other.

I have had the privilege of joining many of their virtual annual general meetings, and I want to sincerely thank their members and executive committees for their tireless efforts, especially at this difficult time. I thank the Alta Vista, Canterbury, Eastway Gardens, Elmvalle Acres, Faircrest Heights, Fairlea, Heron Park, Hunt Club, Hunt Club Park, Ridgemont, Riverside Park, Riverview Park and South Keys Greenboro community associations.

I am so very proud to represent them, and look forward to continuing to work with them in 2021.

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FIREARMS

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not grow up around hunting or sport shooting. In fact, when I was a kid, I asked my dad to go camping and he said that he did not move to Canada to cook and sleep outside, but I know how important it is for people in my riding and right across Canada to own firearms and use them in a safe and lawful manner. It is a way of life, which is why last week I went to the Phoenix Gun Range in Edmonton to start the process of taking the Canadian firearms safety course and getting my PALs.

The reality is that banning firearms used by law-abiding citizens does nothing to stop the dangerous criminals who obtain their guns illegally. The vast majority of gun crimes are committed with illegally obtained guns, which is something that the Liberals have failed to address.

Statements by Members

I encourage all members of the House to learn about the regulations law-abiding firearms owners face. Only then can we have an evidence-based approach to this issue.

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VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF CRIME WEEK

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we mark the 15th anniversary of Victims and Survivors of Crime Week, I stand today to recognize the challenges facing victims, survivors and their families, and the dedicated hard-working professional service providers, advocates and volunteers who support them.

This year’s theme, “Recognizing Courage, Renewing Commitment”, is a reminder of the tremendous strength of individuals as they endure each day.

I also recognize the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and sincerely thank the countless individuals who have stepped up to continue delivering effective services in these difficult times. The pandemic has reminded us how important it is that victims continue to be supported and heard.

I honour their great courage and resilience to come forward and speak about their experiences. We must always ensure victims have access to meaningful supports, information and assistance. This week reminds us to continue our efforts to prevent crime and protect those who are the most vulnerable in our communities.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, let us all be reminded that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ final report concluded that thousands of indigenous women and girls are victims of a genocide.

To end the genocide, the Government of Canada is required to fully and promptly implement all the calls for justice, yet more than a year later we still do not have an action plan led by indigenous women, as promised by the Prime Minister. This failure betrays the truths shared by survivors and their families.

What is worse is that the government is using the pandemic as an excuse for delays. It is as if the Prime Minister is blind to the fact that the pandemic has made violence against women much worse. Calls for action to address poverty, economic inequality and inadequate housing have been made repeatedly in numerous reports and by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

There can be no more delays. There can be no more stolen sisters. The government must treat violence against women, especially indigenous women, with the same urgency as its pandemic response.

Oral Questions

• (1420)

[Translation]

MARC-ANDRÉ BÉDARD

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today Quebec lost a giant whose close relationship with René Lévesque and Quebec made him an integral part of the very soul of Quebec.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I extend my condolences to the friends and family of Marc-André Bédard, and I share in their profound grief. My thoughts go out especially to his son Stéphane, with whom I also share fond memories in cabinet and in the Quebec National Assembly.

A founding member of the Parti Québécois, Mr. Bédard served as the MNA for Chicoutimi, deputy premier, government leader, justice minister and confidant of René Lévesque.

Politics aside, he was a staunch fighter for his region, the Saguenay. He was a key player in the local economy, social life and vibrant cultural sector of his magnificent region. My Quebec friends, if Saguenay is a kingdom, today it has lost the patriarch of the royal family.

Mr. Bédard, Quebec salutes you.

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MARC-ANDRÉ BÉDARD

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, Quebec lost a great man, and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean lost a giant. Marc-André Bédard, former minister of Justice and René Lévesque's right-hand man, died at the age of 85.

He was a formidable politician, a brilliant lawyer and a skilled orator. His values and his convictions were unwavering. He laid one of the first cornerstones of the Quebec civil code, particularly through the reform of family law. He solidified the foundation of the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region by contributing to the development of the aluminum industry, the Chicoutimi Hospital and the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi.

Although he retired from active politics in 1985, we regularly crossed paths with him. He always stayed in close touch with people and was tremendously kind.

We will fondly remember Mr. Bédard, an upright man who was involved in his community and who set an example for politicians of all stripes.

Today, we extend our deepest condolences to his children, Éric, Stéphane, Louis and Maxime, and the entire family.

Thank you, Mr. Bédard, for your enormous contribution. We will never forget.

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[English]

2020 BY-ELECTIONS

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 2015, this government has put a focus on gender

equality in the House. Today, we hit a major historical milestone in Parliament. As Chair of the Ontario Liberal caucus, it is my honour to welcome two strong female voices into the House today.

For the first time in Parliament's history, the House is officially represented by 100 women from across our country. I hope all members of the House will help me in welcoming the new members for Toronto Centre and York Centre.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

NEW MEMBER

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a certificate of the election and return of Ms. Marci Ien, member for the electoral district of Toronto Centre.

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NEW MEMBER INTRODUCED

Ms. Marci Ien, member for the electoral district of Toronto Centre, introduced by the Right Hon. Justin Trudeau.

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• (1425)

NEW MEMBER

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a certificate of the election and return of Ms. Ya'ara Saks, member for the electoral district of York Centre.

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NEW MEMBER INTRODUCED

Ms. Ya'ara Saks, member for the electoral district of York Centre, introduced by the Right Hon. Justin Trudeau.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, months ago Conservatives began raising alarms that Canadians would get vaccines after many other countries. Yesterday, the Prime Minister acknowledged we were right.

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has said the first Americans will receive a COVID-19 vaccine in the next two weeks.

Why did the Prime Minister sign deals that placed Canadians months behind Americans for getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past months, experts have worked with this government to put Canadians in the very best possible position on vaccines.

We now have the best, most diverse portfolio of vaccines anywhere in the world, including agreements with all of the leading vaccine candidates for more doses per capita than just about any other country.

We are continuing to work with experts on a rollout plan. We have faith in our top scientists and doctors as we take a whole-of-government approach to delivering vaccines for Canadians as soon as possible.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, so far we know that Canada will receive its vaccine only after the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, India, Indonesia, and the list goes on. The combined population of countries ahead of Canada in the distribution line is almost 2.5 billion people.

To the nearest 100 million, can the Prime Minister tell the House how many vaccines will be delivered to the rest of the world before a delivery is made to Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of this pandemic, we have worked with top scientists and experts to deliver to Canadians the very best help possible, whether it was making sure we had the right PPE, whether we moved forward on the right support for our treatments and medical systems, and as we move forward on vaccines, which I know everyone is eagerly awaiting because that will signal the beginning of the end of this pandemic.

This summer our experts came together and recommended a portfolio of vaccines that have actually put Canada at the very top, in terms of per capita doses, and those very experts are ensuring that we roll out vaccines to all Canadians.

• (1430)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister admitted the beginning of the end of the pandemic starts later in Canada.

The Minister of Public Services and Procurement has said that Health Canada approvals could also delay vaccine distribution even more.

The Prime Minister has previously said it is not his job to ensure rapid tests and other things are approved rapidly.

I want to know, does the Prime Minister think it is his job to get a vaccine approved quickly, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are working to ensure that Canadians have vaccines as quickly as possible. Indeed that was part of why we worked with experts to ensure that we have the best possible portfolio of vaccines, including more doses per capita than just about any other country. The Minister of Public Services and Procurement has worked extremely hard and is delivering on that. We also know that there are three of the top vaccine candidates that are currently being examined by Health Canada for approvals. We are doing that as it is done to be safe for Canadians and to make sure we can get vaccines quickly.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's health minister made a specific request of the federal government. He asked for a clear, rapid vaccine distribution plan. The provinces need that plan to fight COVID-19. Unfortunately, 10 months in, the Prime Minister is admitting that he does not have a plan.

Will the Prime Minister release his vaccine distribution plan and, if so, when?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, right from the start, we have been implementing a plan to protect Canadians. That plan resulted in us having the best portfolio of vaccines of any country in the world, with more doses per capita than any other country.

We have done the work we needed to do to access vaccines, and we are now working with the provinces and our partners to deliver those vaccines to Canadians.

We will continue to work with the experts, and we will have more to say about this in the weeks to come.

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that he supports Bill 101. That is a first for a party that has always challenged that legislation.

The Conservatives are proposing concrete measures, such as ensuring that Bill 101 applies to federally regulated companies. Quebecers expect more than just lip service.

Will the Liberal government make Bill 101 apply to federally regulated companies?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a proud Quebecer, I have always known that the best way to ensure a bilingual Canada is to ensure that Quebec is first and foremost a francophone Quebec. Our government has been working on this for quite some time.

I will not wait for the Conservatives to lecture us on protecting the French language. They refuse to appoint exclusively bilingual judges to the Supreme Court. They have no problem appointing unilingual anglophone judges to the Supreme Court. We have taken a different approach.

We will protect the French language in Quebec and across Canada.

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HEALTH

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader of the official opposition for announcing that he will vote in favour of the Bloc Québécois legislation.

Oral Questions

On October 23, Quebec's health minister sent a letter to the federal Minister of Health, asking about next steps, but he has yet to receive a response. The committee working on this file is avoiding the issue of vaccines. We are not getting the full story. However, solutions do exist.

The Prime Minister said that mass production of the vaccine is impossible. However, some are saying that for certain quantities, that is not true. It would have been possible to produce a certain number of doses rapidly, which we could have had before we get vaccines from abroad. It is not about quantity, it is about timing.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that his strategy fails to protect the most vulnerable?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from day one, we have been working with experts across the country to meet Canadians' expectations.

That is how we ended up securing more doses of vaccine per capita than any other country in the world. That is how we ended up with a solid plan to work with the provinces and territories and our partners to deliver these vaccines as soon as they are available.

We will work with the experts who established these plans, because, on this side of the House, we trust experts and scientists from across the country.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not about having more doses per capita, it is about having the right number of doses for the people who need it most urgently. Anyone can understand that.

Canada has an approval process that generally takes a little longer than that of other countries. This is often justified, because we take a long-term view. However, in this case, it is an emergency. In this context, every day counts.

Will the Prime Minister consider speeding up Canada's approval process to align with its suppliers and international allies?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every expert and scientist in the country is working on COVID-19.

Vaccination experts provided us with recommendations that helped us establish the best portfolio of potential vaccines anywhere in the world. We will continue to work with them and with our partners in Canada.

I made an announcement last summer about investments in Montreal that will ensure that we have vaccine manufacturing capacity. The Conservative government under-invested in science, development and research, but we will continue to invest and to be there to meet Canadians' expectations.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everyone is afraid because of COVID-19.

Cases are on the rise, and the announcement of a vaccine gave people hope. The Prime Minister said that we cannot produce vaccines in Canada right now, but back in August, he announced that the National Research Council of Canada would be able to produce vaccines.

What changed? Canadians need an answer and a plan. What is the plan for getting vaccines in Canada right away?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was indeed very proud to announce an investment in the National Research Council of Canada in August in order to ensure that it is able to produce vaccines in emergency situations. That will be implemented for next summer or fall.

In the meantime, we have been working with partners around the world to ensure that Canada will have access to tens of millions of doses of the vaccine when they become available.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a second wave. People are deeply and desperately afraid of what that means for their family, with COVID-19 cases on the rise. The announcement of vaccines gave people hope, but when the Prime Minister said we are not able to produce them in Canada, people were afraid again.

In the summer the Prime Minister announced that the National Research Council could produce vaccines, but now it seems as though we cannot. We need to know what the plan is. Canadians are worried and afraid. They need to know there is a clear plan with dates for how these vaccines will be delivered. What is the plan?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the member opposite actually read the press release from last summer. He just did not read the whole thing. It is an investment and a commission to build a vaccine-manufacturing facility at the Royalmount National Research Council facility in Montreal, but we are still in construction of that facility.

We have made investments to stand up more biomanufacturing capacity in Canada after 10 long years of a Conservative government that saw most of our vaccine manufacturers cut their production and, indeed, leave Canada. We will continue to invest in science. We will deliver vaccines to Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister and his government even bother to negotiate the right for Canada to manufacture the leading vaccine candidates here in Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, around the world, various parliaments and governments are having to explain to their citizens and to their oppositions why Canada has done so much better than them on getting a better portfolio of vaccines and more doses per capita than their countries were able to.

Canada has negotiated, through working with experts and scientists and relying on their recommendations, an excellent portfolio of vaccines with tens of millions of doses for Canadians. Those scientists and researchers are working very quickly to get those vaccines as soon as possible to Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it does not matter what portfolio of vaccines we have if Canadians cannot get it until 2030.

The Prime Minister did not answer the question I just asked him, which is very material. He said he has spent all this money on developing vaccine-manufacturing capacity. Did he, his industry minister, his procurement minister or whoever even bother to negotiate the rights for us to manufacture those vaccines here at home?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to reassure anyone who actually might have listened to, or might tend to believe, anything the member just said. We will get those vaccines well in advance of the dates she is offering up, which I will not even repeat.

We have signed and secured vaccine-delivery contracts for 2021 with tens of millions of doses. We know how important it is to deliver them quickly. In signing the contracts, yes, we looked at different ways of ensuring domestic production as much as we were able to, but that, unfortunately, is not something we can move forward on.

• (1440)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I notice about the Prime Minister is that whenever we ask him direct questions he cannot answer, the first thing he does is impugn the character of strong women, and that is wrong and sexist.

Instead of saying to me what I should not believe or what I do not know, answer the question. Did you even bother to negotiate the right for Canada to manufacture these vaccines at home? Did you? Do we have the ability to do this, and when are Canadians going to get these vaccines?

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members to place their questions through the Speaker and not directly to the person. Of course the answers have to go through the Speaker as well.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, Canada has the best portfolio of vaccines purchased in the world, including two domestic vaccine candidates, VIDO-InterVac and Medicago, but the member opposite was asking what happened to domestic manufacturing in Canada. The Conservative government happened to domestic manufacturing.

In 2007, AstraZeneca and Bristol Myers closed their Canadian manufacturing operations. In 2010, Johnson & Johnson and Merck's Montreal research centres closed their facilities. In 2011, Teva closed one of its Canadian manufacturing operations. In 2012, AstraZeneca, GSK and Sanofi announced closings and layoffs.

That is what happened to manufacturing—

Oral Questions

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleasantly surprised. Following our questions yesterday, we were finally able to move our motion before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, after many weeks of obstruction by the Liberals.

The bill on the modernization of official languages must be introduced before December 11. Will the Prime Minister commit to respecting the wishes of the committee members who unanimously adopted this motion?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has an excellent Minister of Official Languages who has been working hard for the past several years to protect French across the country and especially in Quebec.

In the latest throne speech, we mentioned how important this is, so I can assure members that we will be moving forward with the long-awaited modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his ministers have been beating around the bush for weeks and refuse to introduce the bill on the two official languages before Christmas.

We heard on the news this morning that the minister is instead preparing a white paper for next year. The problem is that all the consultations have been completed, and recommendations have been submitted by organizations, the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Senate. We do not need a white paper. We do not need more consultations. We need a bill before Christmas, end of story.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will always continue to protect and promote our official languages.

That is why we amended the long-form census to enumerate all rights holders. That is why we supported Ontario's French-language university and developed a historic \$1.7-billion plan to support our communities. That is why we have only appointed bilingual judges to the Supreme Court, something that the Conservatives refuse to do. As we said in the throne speech, we are committed to protecting French in both Quebec and the rest of Canada, and we will continue to work on modernizing the Official Languages Act.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals talk about presenting a white paper on official languages, but the Liberals are rejecting a unanimous motion from the National Assembly calling for Bill 101 to apply to federally regulated businesses. We know that many senior Liberal officials in Montreal have always fought against Bill 101.

Will the Prime Minister side with the National Assembly of Quebec or with the Liberal officials?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a hard time taking the Conservative Party seriously when it comes to protecting French.

Will they commit to appointing only Supreme Court justices who can speak French?

That is a commitment that we in the Liberal Party have made. As a Liberal government, we have fulfilled that commitment three times, and we will continue to do so.

Will the Conservative Party commit to only appointing Supreme Court justices who can speak French?

* * *

• (1445)

HEALTH

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from the French language to vaccines, the Prime Minister is definitely putting way too many things off until next year. The thing is, he is the most powerful person in the country, and it is his responsibility to protect the health, safety and lives of the most vulnerable members of society.

The problem is that he cannot tell us when we will get the vaccines. He says it could be sometime between later and much later. A lot of things are going to happen between now and then. He could have done as others did and negotiated licences to protect and produce a supply of vaccines.

Why did he not do that?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have faced all kinds of challenges and issues since the start of the pandemic. We had to move quickly to deliver assistance to all Canadians via the CERB, the emergency wage subsidy and support for small businesses.

We had to deliver PPE across the country. We had to work with the provinces to help them protect their citizens. We worked with experts to secure the best vaccine contracts of any country in the world. We will keep working with the experts and we will keep our promises to Quebecers and Canadians.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not interested in the Prime Minister's excuses for his failure. I am very interested in solutions. It is very clear that the Prime Minister needs to answer to Parliament. This is a terrible situation. The delays could go on for months.

He has made the wrong decisions. He could have authorized the production of the vaccine.

Is it because he promised not to authorize the production of vaccines in Canada in the agreements he signed?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the start of the pandemic and at every step, we relied on the experts, scientists, and those who have worked with vaccines and vaccine procurement for years. We relied on the experts. They provided the best vaccine plan of any country. We will continue to work with them to ensure that these vaccines get to Canadians as quickly as possible.

We will do that with a concrete plan to help Canadians. We will get through this pandemic together.

[English]

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister tried to excuse his failures by saying that Canada does not have any domestic production capacity for vaccines. Did he just realize that we have been in a pandemic for eight months? The Prime Minister has admitted that getting Canadians first access to a vaccine was not the priority for the Liberal government.

Why on earth did the Prime Minister give \$173 million to a Quebec company, Medicago, to develop a vaccine and manufacturing facility and then state we do not have any production capacity?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have worked with the top experts in this country to ensure that Canada is as best positioned as possible to get through this pandemic. That is why we have invested in pharmaceutical companies and have invested to restore Canada's biomanufacturing capacities, after 10 years of the Conservative government saw most of the manufacturers leave this country.

We are continuing to invest in science and research, despite the years of neglect by the previous government. We will ensure that Canadians get vaccines as quickly as possible. We will get through this pandemic together.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that does not help today. The Prime Minister has had eight months to deal with this. I have a son who is compromised and worries every day about his health and the health of his caregivers. We have no rapid tests, no vaccine access and no manufacturing. The Prime Minister said that the citizens of vaccine manufacturing countries will likely get the vaccine before manufacturers ship internationally.

Let us ask him this again. Did the Prime Minister even bother to negotiate the right to manufacture the leading vaccines in Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have trusted experts and scientists to make the right decisions to keep Canadians safe. We have followed that advice. We have made sure that we are delivering for Canadians.

I would ask the member opposite, who understands how important it is to protect every single life, why the Leader of the Opposition took part in events in Alberta without masks or distancing, why his colleague, the MP for Lethbridge, downplayed, this week, the number of deaths in Alberta, or why the MP for Niagara West compared COVID to the flu just a few weeks ago.

On this side of the House, we respect science.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for weeks, the Prime Minister has been saying that other countries are jealous because he secured the largest number of vaccines, hundreds of millions of them.

As far as I know, each person does not need eight doses. The vaccine only needs two doses to work. We would like an answer to the following question: Did the Prime Minister forget to negotiate a clause to allow the vaccine to be manufactured in Canada, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to explain to my hon. colleague that we did sign a number of agreements with different companies because this is a new vaccine and we do not yet know which one will be most effective for a particular age group, nor do we know how difficult it will be to manufacture or deliver.

That is why the government listened to the experts. We signed agreements with many companies to ensure that when the vaccines are available, Canadians will receive safe doses so that we can put an end to this pandemic.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I get from that answer is that the government failed when it comes to negotiations and at the operational level.

There are vaccines coming. They are soon going to be approved. Why will the major nations of the world get the vaccine quickly while Canada still has to wait several more months? Can the Prime Minister explain that? People want to know.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, we signed agreements with as many companies as possible to get as many doses of the vaccine as possible for Canadians.

We know that that is how we are going to get through the pandemic. We will continue to work with experts to make sure that the vaccines are safe and that Canadians can have access to them as quickly as possible.

I want to point out that three very promising vaccines are currently being examined by Health Canada so that they can be delivered to Canadians as quickly as possible.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the outbreaks of COVID-19 in Nunavut could have dire consequences for the people of Nunavut, who are already faced with historic underfunding when it comes to health care. We have written a letter to the Prime Minister asking the Prime Minister to deliver all help necessary, including more protective equipment and more testing to help the people of Nunavut.

Will the Prime Minister commit to doing everything within his power to help protect the people of Nunavut?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

From the very beginning, we have been working closely with the northern premiers, including Premier Savikataaq of Nunavut, to ensure they get all the support they need. We have ensured that northern and remote communities have the resources they need, with 3,792 rapid tests shipped, 771,000 items of PPE shipped, \$13 million through the safe restart agreement and \$130 million in federal funding to address health, economic and transportation priorities across the three territories.

I am in regular communication with the Nunavut government and I spoke to the premier last week. We are continuing to assist the government in any way necessary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many of the hardest-hit communities in our country, like Brampton, are communities that are predominantly racialized, with front-line essential workers. These are the people who deliver the goods that help feed our families and keep us safe. They do not need to be blamed; they need to be supported. Brampton and many other communities like Brampton have been underfunded when it comes to health care. They were in a health care crisis before the pandemic.

Will the Prime Minister commit to providing the adequate funding for health care, resources and testing that Brampton and hard-hit communities need?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over \$25 billion is the money we transferred directly to the provinces to help them with the safe restart, with getting kids back to school, with supporting their health systems and with protecting the most vulnerable.

That is on top of the money we sent directly to citizens across the country to replace lost income because of COVID-19 and lost jobs because of COVID-19, and to support small businesses in Brampton, Mississauga and right across the country that had to close down.

We have moved forward, with the unanimous consent of the House, on extra help for commercial rent support of up to 90% where places were closed down.

* * *

• (1455)

[Translation]

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which marks the beginning of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

It is an opportunity to reflect on the devastating effects gender-based violence continues to have, and to renew our commitment to end violence against women, girls and people of all gender identities and expressions.

Oral Questions

Could the Prime Minister explain to the House today what our government is doing to end this violence and to support survivors?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel for her question and for the hard work she does for her constituents.

To support victims and survivors of violence, and to ensure that no one is left behind, we have allocated \$100 million in emergency funding to shelters, crisis centres for survivors of sexual assault and other organizations serving people living with violence. Today, and every day, we are committed to ending gender-based violence in all its forms.

We recognize that the COVID-19 crisis has made things even more difficult for many people. We will be there to help them.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second wave is overwhelming many indigenous communities and they are concerned the government does not have a plan. Ensuring vulnerable populations and communities have access to a vaccine must be a priority.

The Prime Minister was slow on the border, slow to make up his mind on masks, slow to get rapid tests and now Canadians are worried these last-minute Liberals were too slow in securing vaccines.

When will the Prime Minister outline his plan to ensure indigenous communities have access to a vaccine?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have seen an alarming rise in the number of COVID-19 cases across Canada, particularly in indigenous communities.

We have ensured indigenous communities have what they need to fight and prevent the spread of COVID-19, including \$2.4 billion to support indigenous families, students, businesses, communities and organizations. We have processed more than 1,300 PPE shipments. We will continue to work hand-in-hand with community leadership and are ready to provide additional support as needed, including as we move forward in rolling out vaccines to the communities most in need.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard horror stories about the government's attempts to roll out PPE deliveries and COVID-19 testing. Members of the James Smith Cree Nation were told by indigenous services staff to sew their own masks. The Liberal government sent PPE to China and told indigenous Canadians to sew their own masks.

Will the Prime Minister have a real plan to ensure vaccine distribution to first nations communities is a priority, or will they once again be told to fend for themselves?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of this pandemic, this government has stepped up in partnership with indigenous communities to ensure that the first wave did not hit them particularly hard, and throughout the second wave, we continue to be there for them.

We will continue to be there to support communities across Manitoba, for example, that are suffering a terrible spike in the province, and communities across the Prairies facing challenges right now. The federal government will continue to be there to work with them, to protect them, to support them, and we will continue to do so with experts as we roll out vaccines to the most vulnerable populations.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 cases are rapidly rising and long-term care is in crisis today. The time to wait for supports is over, yet long-term care continues to be left out of federal programs. Still, there is no adequate access to rapid testing, and now Canada is falling behind the pack in receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. Long-term care residents, their families and those who care for them are owed much better.

Where is the Liberal government's detailed plan on testing and vaccine deployment?

• (1500)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning, we have worked hand-in-hand with the provinces to support them in their areas of jurisdiction. We sent over \$25 billion to provinces to ensure a safe back to school for kids and to support the most vulnerable, including people in long-term care facilities.

We sent the Canadian Armed Forces and the Red Cross to support the provinces in their work to keep seniors safe in long-term care facilities. We will ensure, as we move forward on vaccine roll-outs, that we are again working with the provinces to protect those who most need it in the delivery of vaccines.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seniors have been the hardest-hit Canadians during the COVID-19 crisis. They have been isolated from their families for weeks at a time. They have waited months for rapid testing in their communities and in long-term care facilities. Now, they are going to be waiting months as other countries get vaccines before Canada.

How many more outbreaks will Canadian long-term care homes experience because the Prime Minister did not get priority access to a COVID-19 vaccine?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning, we have been there to support our seniors and we will continue to do that.

We have worked with the provinces to support them in their work in keeping seniors safe in long-term care facilities. We respect provincial jurisdiction, but we were also able to step up and provide extra supports so that provinces could do more to prevent outbreaks in long-term care homes, whether it was billions of dollars to protect the most vulnerable, whether it was supports with extra PPE, or whether it is moving forward to share best practices and moving towards national standards. We will continue to be there to protect our seniors, particularly around vaccines.

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[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has two opinions about applying Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses. On the one hand, the Minister of Official Languages says that we must do everything we can to protect French. On the other, the member for Mont-Royal, among others, thinks it is shameful.

The Prime Minister must choose a side.

Will the government choose to act by voting with the Bloc Québécois to apply Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a proud Montrealer and proud Quebecker, I made my choice a long time ago. We will always be there to protect the French language across the country, including in Quebec.

We recognize that in order for Canada to be a bilingual country, Quebec must first and foremost be francophone. I am very pleased to recognize the efforts we have made over the years to defend the French fact in Canada and work with the Government of Quebec to protect French in Quebec as well.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is the problem: The Prime Minister is not prepared to take any action. When we look at what he is doing, there is no difference between him and the member for Saint-Laurent, who thinks that the decline of French is a greatly exaggerated myth.

The Prime Minister must choose between defending French and defending those in his party who are disdainful of French.

Will he choose action and vote to protect French, or will he choose inaction and the decline of French with the member for Saint-Laurent's crowd?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are a federal government that has always been there to protect the French fact across the country, including in Quebec.

We will continue to work to protect French. We will continue, for example, to appoint only bilingual judges to the Supreme Court. We will continue to work to defend the French language through institutions and investments in culture, and by protecting all the richness of the French language in Canada, and especially in Quebec.

We are proud of the record investments that we have made in culture in Quebec, and we will keep investing.

Oral Questions

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on August 24, 2015, in Belleville, Ontario, someone made this promise that “no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they have earned”. Yet, since 2016, the person who said that has spent \$43.5 million fighting veterans and their families in court, forcing them to fight for the support and compensation that they have earned.

Will whoever made that promise and broke it please stand up and explain to veterans and their families why he broke that promise?

• (1505)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, service delivery and support to veterans and their families has been our priority from the very beginning. Since 2016, we have invested nearly \$10.5 billion in new money for our veterans and their families. This funding was invested in new centres of excellence on chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder, on increased financial compensation and more.

That stands in stark contrast to the Conservative approach, including from the Leader of the Opposition, which was to close offices, fire staff and gut Veterans Affairs while nickel-and-diming veterans and using them for photo ops. Our veterans deserve better. That is what we are delivering on.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, who uses them for photo ops?

The Liberals keep fighting veterans and their families in court and it continues. There are 1,400 veterans who have filed a class action lawsuit. Veterans Charles Scott and John Dowe, among many others, have their government fighting them in court for the support that they have earned. The benefit system for veterans is in complete chaos and the responsibility for that lies at the Prime Minister's feet.

Like so many other promises that he made in 2015 and has since broken, will the Prime Minister explain to veterans and their families why he continues forcing them to fight in court for the support and compensation that they have earned?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the very first promises we made to veterans when we were looking to take office in 2015 was that we would reopen the nine Veterans Affairs offices heartlessly shuttered by the Conservatives and that is exactly what we did. On top of that, we invested over \$10 billion in new money for veterans and their families to help them and their families through difficult times. That is what we are there for. We are continuing to pick up the pieces broken by years of Conservative neglect. We will continue to deliver for our veterans.

Oral Questions

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should check. All of the veterans of-fices are closed right now in fact. Why is he not opening them up?

I was proud to work with veterans to settle lawsuits. He spent \$40 million sending veterans to court and this week Legions testified that their late support is causing Legions across the country to close. Legions not only help our veterans better than the government clearly, but also they form strong communities.

Record backlogs, wait times, a Prime Minister who does not keep his commitments, does the Prime Minister still believe veterans are asking for more than he can give?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, jokes, that is what the member opposite delivers for veterans in the House, jokes about the pandemic and closures of veterans of-fices. That is shameful, but it is entirely consistent with what the Leader of the Opposition did when he was the minister for veterans affairs and what his predecessor Julian Fantino did when he was minister for veterans affairs. They shut down veterans offices, which we then reopened. We invested \$10 billion in new money for veterans. We will be there for our veterans unlike the things that they did for veterans.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Marci Ien (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am immensely proud to rise in the House today to ask a question that is top of mind for my constituents in Toronto Centre, and I would say, indeed all Canadians who are deeply concerned about how we are going to address climate change and how we can retool our economy for the future.

Could the Prime Minister please update the House on how we can get to a cleaner future and a stronger economy?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member for Toronto Centre will proudly represent her constituents in the House for many years to come.

Climate change remains one of the greatest challenges of our time. That is why last week we introduced the net-zero emissions accountability act, which lays out a framework of accountability and transparency to reach the goal of net-zero emissions in a way that gives Canadians confidence. This is a fundamental step in our strategy to build a strong, resilient economy and future that works for everyone.

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● (1510)

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us chat with the Prime Minister about supply management.

The Liberals' compensation plan was announced shortly before the 2019 election. Cheques were supposed to go out right after the election. It has been radio silence ever since. Not a peep about compensation for 2020 even though there are fewer than 40 days left in the year. Not a peep about 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 or 2026.

This is a matter of respect. When will the Prime Minister deliver compensation to dairy, egg and poultry producers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always stood up for dairy producers and supply management, and we always will.

We committed to full and fair compensation in the amount of \$1.75 billion, and that will be delivered before the end of the fiscal year. Beginning in August 2019, all dairy producers who applied received a cheque for the first instalment.

We protected supply management during negotiations for the new NAFTA. We have kept our promise to compensate farmers, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important to remind members that dairy producers are not the only ones under supply management.

There has been a lot of talk, but no answers. Egg and poultry producers have not seen a penny, despite the repeated promises of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Dairy processors have been met with same disturbing silence from the Liberals. There has not been a word about compensation for the Canada-United States-Mexico agreement. The Prime Minister is tooting his own horn on supply management, which he only talks about when an election is on the horizon.

Farmers are tired of waiting. When will supply-managed farmers get their cheques?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party has always defended supply management.

We introduced the system 40 years ago, and it still works very well for farmers and producers. We will always defend supply management. When we had to renegotiate NAFTA with an American president who wanted to completely dismantle supply management, we held our own and were able to negotiate a good agreement.

We pledged to compensate supply-managed farmers, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party made promises to everyone before getting elected.

Routine Proceedings

The problem is that it never keeps its promises, except the ones it makes to its Liberal friends. The most recent people to be abandoned are farmers, who the Liberals promised to give compensation for trade agreements. Farmers are struggling and they have given enough. When will the Prime Minister keep his promise?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear the opposition leader say that farmers are our friends because they are.

We are keeping our promises by giving them \$1.75 billion in compensation. Every dairy farmer who submitted an application has received a cheque for the first instalment. We will continue to protect supply management and stand up for our dairy, poultry and egg farmers. We will continue to be there to protect farmers across the country.

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[English]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the community in my riding of York Centre is extremely concerned about the rise of anti-Semitism, online hate speech and other forms of prejudice, which have been extremely exacerbated during this pandemic.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House what our government is doing to combat anti-Semitism in Canada and around the world, and honour the memory of the six million Jewish people murdered during the Holocaust?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member for York Centre and congratulate her for taking her seat in the House today.

This government has repeatedly stated that anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial have absolutely no place in our society. Earlier today, we announced that the Hon. Irwin Cotler would be our new special envoy on preserving Holocaust remembrance and combating anti-Semitism.

The special envoy will lead Canada's delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, advance Holocaust education, awareness and remembrance, all while taking meaningful action to combat anti-Semitism at home and abroad.

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CHILD CARE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are announcing another plan for child care. While it is vitally important that we have child care, particularly in the recovery, given that women have been disproportionately impacted, do not mind me if I do not hold my breath, given the fact that the Liberals have promised child care since the nineties. Since then, kids who needed child care have grown up and have kids who now need child care. We need a concrete action plan, at least \$2 billion, to keep the existing child care spaces open and \$10 billion a year to truly create a universal child care plan.

Will the government back up this announcement with real concrete action to deliver the child care we need?

• (1515)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the immense pressure that COVID-19 has put on Canadian families, particularly on women. That is why investing more than \$7.5 billion in early learning and child care over the next decade is what we are going to do. This year alone we have invested more than a billion dollars to help provinces and territories with child care, but we are not stopping there.

In the Speech from the Throne, we committed to building on our investments and creating a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories, so that all families have access to the high-quality and affordable child care they deserve.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you will find that there is unanimous consent for the following motion: That the House of Commons urge the government to ensure that the obligations of online undertakings to invest in Canadian creation and production in the new Broadcasting Act set a minimum investment threshold for creation and production of no less than 40% for original French-language production and no less than 5% for original Indigenous-language production.

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 motion to express their disagreement.

Accordingly, all those opposed to the hon. members' motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present the report of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting its participation at the meetings of the APF Education, Communication and Cultural Affairs Committee and the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the APF, held in Hanoi, Vietnam, from February 24 to 28, 2019.

Routine Proceedings

I am also pleased to present the second report of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting its participation at the workshop on enhancing the role of parliamentarians from member states of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie in the Universal Periodic Review process, held in Geneva from December 10 to 11, 2019.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association's first part of the 2020 ordinary session of the PACE, in Strasbourg, France, from January 27 to 31, 2020, and the report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association meeting of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, which also took place in Strasbourg, France, from February 12 to 13, 2020.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, entitled "Main Estimates 2020-21".

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, entitled "Supplementary Estimates (B), 2020-21".

In addition, I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in relation to the motion adopted on Thursday, November 12, 2020, regarding the committee's opinion of the backlog of applications for veterans disability benefits.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage concerning the main estimates, 2020-21, as well as its second report concerning the supplementary estimates (B), 2020-21. The committee has considered the estimates referred by the House and reports the same.

In addition, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to Bill C-5, an act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code regarding a national day for truth and reconciliation. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

● (1520)

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-7, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding medical assistance in dying. The committee has studied

the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in relation to the main estimates, 2020-21. The committee has considered the estimates referred by the House and reports the same.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth and fifth reports of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in relation to its studies on the main estimates for the fiscal year 2020-21 and the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year 2020-21.

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EMPLOYING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-255, An Act respecting the development of a national employment strategy for persons with disabilities.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise to introduce the employing persons with disabilities act. I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, for seconding this bill.

This legislation provides for the development of a national employment strategy to increase the economic participation of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities or diverse needs are facing unique and heightened challenges due to COVID-19. A recent survey found over one-third of respondents with long-term conditions or disabilities has experienced a job loss or reduced hours during the pandemic. Even before this, there were over 400,000 working-age Canadians with disabilities who were not employed, but whose disabilities did not prevent them from working.

People with disabilities have a great deal to contribute to our society. As we look to build back better, we must do more to promote the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce. I call upon all parliamentarians to support this vital initiative because when people with diverse abilities succeed, we all succeed.

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

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

ECONOMIC STATEMENT

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 some discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, at 4 p.m. on Monday, November 30, 2020, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings to permit the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to make a statement followed by a period of up to 10 minutes for questions and comments; after the statement, a member from each recognized opposition party and a member of the Green Party, may reply for a period approximately equivalent to the time taken by the minister's statement and each statement shall be followed by a period of 10 minutes for questions and comments; after each member has replied, or when no member rises to speak, whichever comes first, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day.

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. I hear no dissenting voices.

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)

* * *

● (1525)

PETITIONS

OPIOIDS

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to table a petition from my constituents. Of course, the Downtown Eastside, my own riding, is struggling with the opioid crisis.

The petitioners acknowledge and note that the opioid crisis is one of the most deadly public health emergencies of our lifetime with a death taking place, on average, about every two hours and a death toll of almost 15,400 people in the past four years alone.

The petitioners are calling on the government to declare the opioid crisis as a national health emergency and to take steps to end overdose deaths and injuries, and to also immediately collaborate with provinces and territories to deliver a comprehensive, pan-Canadian overdose action plan. Any plan should consider that other countries have used things such as legal regulation of drugs to ensure safe supply, decriminalization for personal use and changes to the flawed drug policy and policing.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be presenting two petitions in the House today, both with respect to important issues of international human rights.

The first petition responds to the horrific situation of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. Petitioners note an Associated Press story from earlier this year that identified birth suppression, forced sterilization, forced abortion and the forced insertion of IUDs into Uighur women, as well as other measures of mass internment and violence against Uighurs.

Following this evidence, the petitioners have two specific asks. They want the House and the government to formally recognize that Uighurs in China have been and are being subjected to genocide, and they want us to use the Justice for Victims of Corrupt For-

Routine Proceedings

eign Officials Act, the Magnitsky act, and sanction those who are responsible for the heinous crimes being committed against Uighur people.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is in support of Bill S-204, a bill that would seek to make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ that had been harvested or trafficked.

This also responds to the human rights situation in China and concerns about forced organ harvesting and trafficking that target Falun Gong practitioners, Uighurs and other communities in China. Although Bill S-204 does not name a specific country, it would apply to any case of forced organ harvesting or trafficking.

I commend these petitions to the consideration of all members.

OPIOIDS

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the opioid crisis is one of the most deadly public health emergencies of our lifetime, with a death taking place, on average, every two hours, and a death toll of almost 15,400 people in the past four years alone. That number is from before COVID-19.

Many Canadians, including representatives from the group Moms Stop the Harm, have asked me to present this petition calling on the government to declare the overdose crisis a national public health emergency. The petitioners also ask that the government, by working with provinces and territories, take steps to end overdose deaths and overdose injuries by immediately developing a well-funded and comprehensive pan-Canadian overdose action plan.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise to present yet another petition from young people in my riding of South Okanagan—West Kootenay and the neighbouring riding of Kootenay—Columbia. They are concerned about climate change, and they point out that the government's targets on climate change are totally inadequate and the actions have been even less effective.

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They want jobs that are sustainable and not for short-term gain at the expense of future generations. They therefore ask the government to support their future with a detailed climate strategy, science-based targets and the elimination of fossil-fuel subsidies, redirecting those funds to renewable energy systems, energy efficiency, low-carbon transportation and job training.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am here to rise on a petition of a very urgent and serious nature. Chinese Communist Party officials in China are isolating and subjecting the Uighur population to all sorts of terrible, invasive situations from forced labour to forced organ harvesting. It is very concerning.

The petitioners would like to see that their government, the Government of Canada, use the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, the Magnitsky act, as a way to bring international attention to this violation of international norms.

• (1530)

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, this petition is close to my heart because I am a member of the international human rights subcommittee.

The petitioners request that Bill S-204 be moved through the Senate and then to the House as quickly as possible. The goal of that piece of legislation is to amend the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad in order to acquire human organs that have been removed without consent and to track down any financial transactions that take place as a result of such travel.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present e-petition 2693. I know the rules require I summarize the petition. It is a very detailed, technical and important one, so my summary is this.

The petition deals with the many ways an interconnected coast-to-coast-to-coast, province-to-province and territory-to-province electricity grid can provide storage for, as well as the movement of, electricity. It can lead to a decarbonized electricity network, a smart grid, that would help Canada meet greenhouse gas targets and boost economic success. It also highlights the many different kinds of existing battery storage that already exists, such as pumped hydro-electric storage reservoirs.

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to put in place a research fund and support an interconnected electricity grid strategy for both the movement and storage of decarbonized 100% renewable electricity for Canada.

* * *

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.): Madam Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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 ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADIAN NET-ZERO EMISSIONS ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.) moved that Bill C-12, An Act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to address the House of Commons today for the second reading debate of Bill C-12, the Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act. It is an act that I believe is extremely important.

Our government's highest priority continues to be the health and well-being of Canadians. That is why we are taking unprecedented action to combat the health emergency presented by COVID-19. As we come through this, and we will, that commitment to the health and well-being of Canadians demands that we put two things in place with an eye on the post-pandemic horizon.

First, we must build back better in a way that makes the economy more competitive, cleaner, stronger and fairer than it was before.

Second, Canadians expect us to have a thoughtful plan to counter a parallel emergency that has continued during the pandemic and will get significantly worse in future if we do not take more action than we are now, that being climate change.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Canadians know how much of a threat climate change is to our health, our economic well-being and our planet. We are already experiencing the ravages of climate change, what with extreme weather events, catastrophic floods and devastating fires.

As with COVID-19, ignoring the risks of climate change is not an option. Such an approach will only increase costs and worsen the long-term consequences. To use a pandemic metaphor, if we want to flatten the climate curve and avoid its worst effects, the best available science tells us that the planet must reach net zero by 2050.

[*English*]

Reaching net zero by 2050 means that emissions produced 30 years from now would be fully absorbed through actions that scrub carbon from the atmosphere, whether through nature, such as planting trees or through technology, such as carbon capture and storage systems. This imperative comes at a time when the world is changing. We are seeing an acceleration of global momentum and healthy competition toward a net-zero carbon economy by 2050 as nations, investors and consumers recognize the ecological imperative and the economic opportunity of moving to a clean economy.

Over 120 countries have made a commitment to be net zero by 2050, including many of our major economic competitors and trading partners. This will likely soon include our biggest trading partner south of the border. Low carbon and climate-resilient projects and technologies are not just good for the planet, they are good for business.

Mark Carney, the former governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England, recently said that the transition to net zero "...is creating the greatest commercial opportunity of our age." On the day before Bill C-12 was introduced in this House, Tiff Macklem, the current Governor of the Bank of Canada, said that "...we need to position Canada to seize the climate-smart opportunities that consumers, workers and investors are looking for."

Major Canadian companies have already committed to net zero by 2050, including companies such as Cenovus, Teck Resources, MEG Energy, Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Enbridge and the Canadian Steel Producers Association. Shell's global chief executive officer says that net zero is "the only way to go" for his company. Canadian companies such as Maple Leaf Foods and CAE are already carbon neutral.

Leveraging climate action as we rebuild Canada's post-pandemic economy is simply the smart thing to do. It will ensure that we emerge stronger, better prepared and more competitive in a low-carbon world.

[*Translation*]

During the last election campaign, our government promised to come up with a plan that would allow Canada to exceed its pollution reduction targets and create a legally binding process for all future governments to set national climate targets that will achieve the science-based goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. Bill C-12, the Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act, is the fulfill-

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ment of our commitment to Canadians to put these legally binding processes in place.

This process is essential to our strategy for a sustainable post-pandemic economic recovery and long-term prosperity for all Canadians in a low-carbon world. It reflects our government's desire to stimulate our collective ambition for climate action and to do more than ever before in a considered and pragmatic way, guided by scientific data and evidence.

[*English*]

The proposed Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act is an important contribution to articulating a Canadian vision for a clean economy, and it sends a signal of the depth of our resolve to be a serious competitor in the clean global marketplace.

To do that, we need to tool up for low-carbon advantage and demonstrate that Canada is meeting climate risk head-on. By doing so, we can provide the confidence and certainty required to attract investment and ensure that Canadians are delivering products and services that will be in high demand the world over now and well into the future.

The bill marks the first time a Canadian government has introduced emissions accountability legislation to address climate change and achieve net zero by 2050. One element of its importance is that accountability legislation has the muscle to depoliticize climate action by setting legal requirements on governments to achieve climate headway. It is intended to ensure that never again will Canada have a government like that of Stephen Harper, which established an emissions reduction target but never brought forward a credible plan to achieve it.

The Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act would be the first significant step in the second phase of our government's climate plan. In phase one, during our first term in government, we spearheaded the creation of a pan-Canadian framework to fight climate change that comprised over 50 separate initiatives, including a price on pollution, a plan to phase out coal by 2030 and historic investments in public transit, nature and renewables.

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In the coming weeks, the government will be announcing an enhanced clean-growth plan and further investments that encourage, accelerate and support the work Canadian businesses are doing to move to a thriving carbon-neutral economy. The plan will also provide Canadians with visibility on how we will meet and exceed our 2030 Paris Agreement target.

Bill C-12 provides the legal framework to put the emissions reductions goal of that plan and future plans between now and the middle of the century into law. The act would provide a legally binding process for this government and for future governments to set national climate targets on a rolling basis every five years between 2030 and 2050 and to meet the goal of net zero by 2050.

It would provide that this government and future governments must bring forward detailed plans as to how they would meet these targets. In the near term, Bill C-12 would require the Government of Canada to establish the initial 2030 target within six months of the act's coming into force, along with an emissions reduction plan. Both would have to be tabled in Parliament.

A progress report would have to be tabled by 2027. If the government of the day is not on track to meet the 2030 milestone, it would have to detail how it will get back on track. In addition, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, supported by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, would have to examine and report on the Government of Canada's implementation of the measures aimed at mitigating climate change within five years of the coming into force of this act and every five years thereafter.

For each subsequent milestone year, in 2035, 2040 and 2045, a target would have to be set and an emissions reduction plan established at least five years in advance of each subsequent milestone year. Both would have to be tabled in Parliament.

Finally, if a target is not met, the government would have to table a report in Parliament detailing the reasons why and identifying specific actions to correct course and catch-up.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-12 also requires the Minister of Finance to publish an annual report explaining how the government is managing its financial risks and opportunities related to climate change. This information will help the government manage the risks of climate change in its decision-making.

This is in addition to our current reporting requirements, including the fifth biennial report to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the official national greenhouse gas inventory that we publish every year.

The five-year targets and the plans for meeting them will be based on the best scientific information available. They will require an inclusive approach that reflects Canada's unique demographics and geography, the importance of our resource-based economy, and the governments' shared responsibility for energy and the environment.

[*English*]

The input and engagement from all parts of Canadian society are crucial. The Government of Canada simply cannot achieve net-zero emissions by the middle of the century on its own. That is why the act would establish the independent net-zero advisory body, a group of up to 15 experts with a diverse range of experience and expertise from across the country. It would include business, labour, indigenous, clean technology and environmental leaders.

The advisory body's ongoing advice to government over the next 30 years would be informed by extensive consultation and engagement with Canadians. Its initial work would focus on identifying actions that support both net zero and economic recovery from the pandemic. The advisory body would provide its advice through an annual public report, and the government would be required to publicly respond to the advisory body's recommendations.

All of the public reporting measures are designed to ensure accountability to Canadians and accountability built on transparency, both of which are vital to establishing credibility with Canadians. Moreover, transparency and accountability are key to fostering dialogue when friction arises on the ways and means of moving forward on climate change. Bill C-12 lays out a framework of accountability and transparency to ensure we reach net zero by 2050 in a way that gives Canadians confidence that as a nation we will succeed in this endeavour.

Should the bill pass, it will be extremely difficult for any future government to shirk its responsibility to take action on climate change. I believe the reaction in Parliament and among Canadians generally would provide severe sanction to a government that did not honour its legal obligations under the act.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

I want to say a few words about the parliamentary process.

It takes co-operation and collaboration to bring about real change, and several parties in the House of Commons have proven their commitment to ambitious climate action, including the NDP, the Bloc Québécois, the Green Party and even some Conservative members.

I want to congratulate the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia for her work on Bill C-215 and the member for Winnipeg Centre for her work on Bill C-232. These bills are part of a long line of bills introduced in an effort to address this problem.

It is important to recognize the contribution made by Jack Layton, who was the first to introduce his bill, the climate change accountability act, in 2007. Unfortunately, that bill was defeated by Conservative senators 10 years ago to the day last month, without debate, despite majority support in the House of Commons.

I would also like to commend the work of my colleague, the government House leader, who managed to get his private member's bill, the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, passed in 2007, before the Harper government repealed it in 2011 and withdrew from the Kyoto protocol.

[English]

In developing the bill, I have reflected on the hard work done by my colleagues in the House and on the work of those who came before us. It is certainly my hope that they see their work and devotion reflected in the spirit and intent of Bill C-12. I am committed to taking an approach of co-operation and collaboration and will consider, in good faith, constructive suggestions to improve this legislation further. That is how the parliamentary process is supposed to work, and I am committed to doing my part to make it work.

I am confident that together, in the spirit of co-operation, we can achieve an outcome that allows us to continue to move another step forward to address the threat of climate change. I have engaged in constructive conversations with many of my parliamentary colleagues on moving forward with action to address climate change, and it is my hope that we can work together to pass the bill in this minority Parliament so that we can quickly move forward on its implementation.

At the end of the day, climate change is a science issue, not an issue of ideology. It should not be a partisan issue. It is my hope that MPs from all parties in the House will work together and collectively support this vital legislation.

As a nation, we cannot afford inaction. It certainly will require resources. It will also require pragmatism and, certainly, Canadian ingenuity.

Canada has the tools to do this, including a skilled and innovative workforce that is already rising to the challenge of emissions reduction. From copper to nickel to energy, Canada has the resources needed to develop, produce and deploy clean technologies and proven expertise. We have a productive and resilient manufacturing sector. We also have the innovative spirit, talent and experience to be among the world's cleanest suppliers of natural resources, and we have the drive, born of a chance, to create a future we can pass along to our children and grandchildren with confidence and with pride.

I am sure that many colleagues, as well as their children, nieces, nephews and grandchildren, have watched some of Sir David Attenborough's programs on the natural world. One of his comments resonated strongly with me. He said, "We are the only species that can imagine the future. Living in balance with nature simply requires the will to do so."

The bill represents a key step in demonstrating our collective will to do so, and I very much look forward to engaging with my colleagues today and in the days to come as we move forward with this very important legislation.

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• (1550)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his outreach in terms of cross-collaboration.

I would like to ask him this in that spirit: Would he be willing to commit today to putting industry representation from the oil and gas sector on his advisory panel?

Also, while I am on my feet, will the minister commit to amendments to recognize, in the bill, the contributions of Canadian energy, not just in terms of history, but in terms of the future?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, I will say a couple of things.

First, it is certainly my intention to announce the advisory panel in the near term. It will be drawn, as I said during my remarks, from across the country and from a range of different experiences. Some of those will be industry experiences and some will be environmentally based. Some will be indigenous leaders. There will be a range of experiences, which is exactly as things should be in the context of looking to have a body that brings forward advice on this important legislation.

Second, with respect to specific proposals, I will certainly review proposals for the bill that are brought forward at committee. I am not going to specify which proposals will proceed or not, as that is a function of the work the committee will be doing. However, I encourage members from all parties to bring forward thoughts and ideas about how they think the bill can be strengthened.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech and his kind words. It is always a pleasure to work with him.

I watched Mr. Attenborough's latest documentary, which is quite powerful and shows us the importance of passing legislation on this issue.

It is great that the bill has set 2050 as a target for achieving net-zero emissions, but I think that it is crucial to have meaningful checkpoints for the next 10 years, which is a very critical time for the climate crisis. On the way to 2030 and 2050, we will inevitably go through 2025. I would therefore like to know why the minister did not include 2025 as a target in the bill.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and for her work.

Of course it is very important that the legislation provide accountability and transparency, and indeed there are some accountability mechanisms in the bill. The Paris targets must be met by 2030, but of course we must have mechanisms to ensure that our government and subsequent governments will be accountable and transparent.

If the hon. member has any suggestions or recommendations, I would be prepared to discuss them in committee.

Government Orders

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister of Environment for introducing the bill, and I appreciate his acknowledgement of the work that the late Jack Layton did 14 years ago when he first introduced his bill to establish those accountability measures.

If we look back 10 years, 2010 seems like a lifetime ago, and if we look ahead to 2030, it seems like a lifetime away. The point I am trying to make here is that the next 10 years are going to be so incredibly important to how we deal with climate change, really determining how we are going to face life on this planet, depending on the actions we take.

I want to press the minister on the 2025 year and the targets we would like to see. If such suggestions do come up at committee, because I am pretty sure they will, would he be amenable to establishing 2025 as the year we need to take a look at and measure the government's targets against?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, I would say a few things.

As the member will have read the bill, the bill has robust accountability measures. The 2030 target is structured around the architecture of Paris, where the vast majority of countries that are party to Paris are focused on 2030. There are certainly important elements in our existing and, certainly, future climate plans that relate to 2025, which certainly are visible and transparent. Certainly, we are open to conversations about how we ensure that people have visibility about how we are tracking with respect to progress to 2030.

However, as I said, I am not going to prejudge the work of the committee. I am open to conversations that the committee will have, and I look forward to the discussions that take place there.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. minister, he cannot pick and choose what parts of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change science gets baked into the bill and what parts of the Paris Agreement he now refers to. I want to make it very clear that I was in Paris. I was there when we negotiated. It is very clear that the target for Canada for 2030 was to be ratcheted up and changed in calendar year 2020. We are expected, as a nation with a 2030 target, to have a new one in place by the end of the calendar year. That is the Paris decision document.

It is also very clear that, if we are going to be grounded in science, it is true that IPCC says that we must have net carbon neutrality by 2050, but to get there they also tell us that, globally, emissions must be cut by at least 45% no later than 2030. In other words, the heavy lifting in reducing emissions in this country must be done before the first target milestone year in this legislation.

I cannot vote for this bill as it now is, and I desperately want to vote for it. I appreciate—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry. I have to give the minister the opportunity to answer.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, I certainly thank the member for her commitment to this important issue.

As I have said in the remarks today and also in conversations that she and I have had, we certainly do intend to bring forward an enhanced climate plan. That is something that I have said very publicly. To her initial point, absolutely, yes we do intend to move forward with an enhanced plan, building on the great work that was done in the pan-Canadian framework, and certainly we intend to move forward in a manner that will enable Canada to be an important participant in the international conversations on climate change. We are committed to that and we will continue to move forward in that direction.

However, I would also say that this bill is an important step forward. I think that if the member looks at the reaction from many in not simply industry or labour organizations but environmental organizations, including Ecojustice, the David Suzuki Foundation, Équiterre and a whole range of others, she will see this is an important step forward.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his leadership. How will this unprecedented legislation and its legally binding requirements help spur the development of emissions-free industries like the SMR sector and the creation of sustainable, well-paying green jobs?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, this sets the architecture in terms of requiring and legally binding governments to be transparent and accountable with respect to moving down the curve to net zero by 2050. As we do that, we are requiring detailed plans be put into place and in order to actually meet that 2050 target and certainly to meet every target along the way, it will have to be plans that involve how we are actually getting at every major source of emissions in this country. Certainly that will need to involve thoughts around zero-emitting technologies, whether those are wind, solar, geothermal, hydro or potentially SMRs, but it is a whole range of those kinds of things, which also involve conversations around hydrogen and carbon capture. It involves—

• (1600)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will have one last question by the hon. member for Abbotsford.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to follow up on the question that my friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands asked, which had to do with the Paris targets. I was in Paris when the Paris Agreement was signed, and I remember the Liberal government signing on to what it called the Harper targets, which were basically the floor that was going to be ratcheted up very quickly in time to meet the 2030 targets. Every credible organization out there has made it very clear that the Liberal government is not meeting those 2030 Paris targets.

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Is it still the minister's plan to meet those targets? Can he explain why every single organization is suggesting that the government will never meet those 2030 targets?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, it is simply not true. The government identified a large chunk of the megatonnes needed to meet those targets in the pan-Canadian framework. The next chunk of those megatonnes to meet and exceed the 2030 targets is something we will be discussing with Canadians in the coming weeks. I look forward to that conversation with my hon. friend.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in this place and debate the people's business, and Bill C-12 is a critically important debate. Last week as parliamentarians we received a 13-minute briefing on the bill with zero opportunity to ask questions and to have those questions answered. We have to ask, why was that? Why was there no opportunity to ask questions? This is a bill that the Prime Minister describes as an accountability framework, and on the very first day we are being denied the simple most important part of being accountable: the right to ask questions.

I have read the bill and much of the media coverage, and on that note I have to give the Liberal government full credit for its media rollout on the bill. Many headlines read "A road map to net-zero emissions," which is rather fascinating because while the bill is clear on where it would like to go, it is completely void of any actual detail on how to get there. In fact, if it were a map, it would simply show where we wanted to be but no map or trails on how to get there. That is kind of the point, is it not?

[*Translation*]

In typical Liberal fashion, this bill will not hold the current government accountable for climate failures, only future governments. The easiest promises to make are those that do not require the maker to be held accountable, and that is exactly what the Liberals are doing.

The Liberals continue to promise both too much and too little when it comes to climate change. Their approach is obviously not working. The Liberal government's projections show that the government is not even close to keeping its current commitments, and yet it plans to set new, even higher targets to be met down the road.

Let us take a look back in history. If we go back about 27 years, in 1993, former Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% relative to 1988 levels by 2005. What happened to those promises? They were broken. There are others.

[*English*]

Let us go to 1997 when Prime Minister Chrétien signed the Kyoto accord. This promise was to reduce our emission levels by a smaller amount of 6% below 1990 levels. That would be achieved by 2012. What happened to that promise? In 2006, when the Liberals were voted out of office, Canada was 30% over that commitment. As a result, we know that former prime minister Stephen Harper eventually had to withdraw Canada from the Kyoto agreement because we could not reach that target.

Let us not forget that in 2009, at the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, Prime Minister Harper matched the U.S. target

to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020 and 30% by 2030 in what was a non-binding agreement. In 2015, shortly after the election of the current Prime Minister, he sent the largest Canadian delegation in history to attend the Paris UN Climate Change Conference and at excess cost, I would say, of \$1 million.

We all know that in Paris, despite often criticizing the former Harper government, ultimately the Liberal government adopted the same targets. Despite what partisan Liberals and others say, Conservative governments, both federally and provincially, have a long record of practical and successful environmental initiatives.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Let us now look at where we are today. Reports indicate that the Liberal government did not keep the commitments it made in 2015. It has missed its 2020 target by 123 million tonnes. Once again, we are not meeting our greenhouse gas reduction targets.

Obviously, the government is following a pattern: It promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a certain amount by a certain date and then it breaks that promise. It makes another promise and then it breaks that one too.

Now, there are new developments. Today, we are examining Bill C-12. This bill once again postpones addressing the problem to such an extent that it will be up to whatever government is in office in 2050 to deal with it.

The government is going to have a problem with the bill's strongest opponents precisely over that.

The government is not proposing anything at all today. It has no road map, no solution, no willingness to listen and no penalties in case of failure.

Once again, they are promising to do more later.

[*English*]

At this point, I probably sound quite negative about the bill. That is not actually my intent. I just firmly believe that when we debate the bill, we must be very candid about what is really up for debate, as it is certainly not a road map as some have described it. I will actually give the Liberal government some credit for that, because it did not follow the usual approach of the Prime Minister, which is to promise things he has no intention of delivering on. We know the Prime Minister is an expert at making promises he will never have to be responsible for. Setting targets 30 years down the line means that future governments have 30 years to figure it out. More importantly, industry has the time to come up with much-needed solutions.

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Indeed, the Minister of Natural Resources has spoken of improving energy efficiency in homes and businesses. He has talked about hydrogen fuel cells, as well as the potential for small modular nuclear reactors, although I will note on the last point that once again the Liberal government has delayed promised plans and details on that. The point is that what the bill would do, by making commitments so far in the future, is leave the door open for future innovation. We know that we will see more electric vehicles in our future, some built right here in Canada, a made in Canada solution.

[Translation]

There is a company in British Columbia that could soon be transporting passengers in the world's first electric seaplane.

These are all exciting examples of the kind of innovation that can reduce our emissions. I am pleased that our Minister of Natural Resources has recognized some of them. Personally, as environment critic, I love it when we can all agree on areas where we can use innovation rather than fiscal measures to reduce our emissions. We will not prosper as a nation by taxing ordinary Canadians and making industry foot the bill for costly regulations. That may be the Liberal way, but it is not the right way.

When I agreed to serve as the environment and climate change critic, our new official opposition leader was clear. He pledged to recognize the importance of ensuring that Canada meets its greenhouse gas emission commitments. If we want to do that, we all have to work together on areas where we can come to an agreement. I believe that much of our time in the previous Parliament was spent talking about issues on which we disagree. When we do that, we are not serving the interests of future Canadians.

● (1610)

[English]

The reality is, from my perspective, there is really nothing to oppose in this bill. In many respects, it is a *Seinfeld* bill. It is largely devoid of details or costs. In fact, I suspect that those who will be opposing this bill will do so for that very reason. Canadians agree on the importance of protecting our environment and natural spaces. It is an issue that our party and leader are passionate about.

In my speech thus far, I have not mentioned the Canadian oil and gas industry, much as this bill is also largely silent on this essential Canadian industry. We know this industry has publicly stated it is committed to the highest environmental standards in the world, and many of its members have committed to net zero by 2050. We need to ensure that these critically important Canadian industries will be part of the solution.

We will be proposing amendments to this bill in committee that clearly state that Canadian oil and gas has the highest environmental standards in the world, and that any action plan must draw on that expertise and ensure that oil and gas play a necessary role in providing the world with energy. This legislation must also recognize that Canadian energy is not the enemy, as many Liberals believe, but part of the solution. As I mentioned previously, we need to find ways that we can work together if we are to succeed.

[Translation]

We also need a mechanism that can, over time, figure out how much it will cost Canadians to remain on that path to net-zero emissions by 2050. The Parliamentary Budget Officer indicated that, in order to meet our current commitments by 2030, the carbon tax might have to increase to over \$200 a tonne, but the Liberals still refuse to be honest with Canadians about that.

I know some people will say that it will cost a lot more to do nothing. However, consider for example someone on a fixed annual income who lives in a 70-year-old house when winter temperatures fall below -20°C. Their monthly heating bill could force them to choose between heat and groceries for the month. We cannot ignore this. We cannot ignore the fact that many rural communities do not have public transit. In many cases, they have lost Greyhound as a private carrier.

Millions of Canadians depend on imported fuel oil to heat their homes because no other options are available. We cannot forget about those Canadians, and they should not be forced to carry a disproportionate share of the cost burden.

[English]

I mention this because when it comes to putting a price on pollution, as the current Liberal government likes to say, we know that all too often some of the biggest industrial polluters typically get exemptions from the price they pay on their pollution because of carbon leakage, which is a big concern.

What is carbon leakage, for those unfamiliar with the term? When an industry in one jurisdiction is paying carbon taxes and cannot compete with that same industry in another jurisdiction that is not paying carbon taxes, the situation is called carbon leakage. We know that if an industry loses market share to heavier-polluting competitors, it affects our economy and does not reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

Carbon leakage is not the only example of where big polluters get a break from paying a price on pollution. In British Columbia, although the B.C. NDP government signed on to the Liberals' carbon tax framework, the new B.C. LNG investment will be exempt from the carbon tax increases called for in that agreement. This is not an isolated incident where a polluting industry in B.C. has secured some form of carbon tax relief.

● (1615)

[Translation]

Why am I raising these points? Because we cannot ignore the fact that more and more major polluters in Canada are being exempted from paying the price for their pollution.

These carbon tax exemptions rarely make the headlines for various reasons, but they do happen. However, the average citizen or the small business owner has to pay for their pollution.

This brings me to the last, but not least, part of my speech on this bill. Since it will take 30 years to meet the targets, we have an opportunity to try to work with our biggest trading partner, the United States. Hopefully, we will have a clearer idea of the policies and regulations required to help us collectively reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

These emissions are a global problem. Climate change has had devastating effects on many sectors in my riding over the past year. Forest fires and floods have caused hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage. Local farmers have been hard hit by changing weather patterns. I am sure that other members in the House have had similar experiences.

Canada is not responsible for global climate change, but we can and must be part of the solution.

[*English*]

It may raise some eyebrows that my party will be supporting this bill at second reading, but if we are going to have any success, we need to find those things that we can agree upon and take action. There are things we can and must agree on.

In summary, I see very little in this bill to oppose. It is not a road map. It is essentially a piece of paper with a destination on it. Fighting climate change at home and around the world is an important goal that requires work. It will be current and future governments that will start to fill in the map and show how they intend to reach that destination, but we must agree on a starting point. I would submit that is precisely what Bill C-12 is: a starting point.

I, for one, will be supporting this bill for what it is, and what it can and must become. What I do not support is the Liberals' failed record on climate change. They are on track to miss their 2030 climate commitments, and they have failed to plant a single tree. My wife has planted more trees than the current government.

The Liberals continue to over-promise and under-deliver when it comes to climate change, and their approach is clearly not working. Conservatives will build a climate policy that respects the jurisdiction of the provinces, focuses on making industry pay rather than taxing ordinary Canadians, and is founded on proven market-based principles for incentivizing positive economic change. Conservatives understand that reaching net-zero is a goal that Canadians care about and want to see action on. We must preserve our shared environment for future generations without sacrificing the jobs Canadians need today or damaging the economic engine that helps fund our vital social programs. Canadian workers are counting on it.

I would like to thank all members for taking the time to hear my comments today.

● (1620)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague and friend's remarks. I am glad to see that he will be supporting the bill. He should not worry, because the trees will get planted. There is no question about that. I was informed about it this morning. We are pretty near there.

Government Orders

The member talked a little about Canadian energy, and I agree with him on that point. Those who communicated, who managed to seize the communication agenda, failed to recognize how many gains the energy industry in Canada has made. We are not going to move ahead and find a solution, in my view, if we do not bring the energy industry and the environment industry together in parallel.

The member mentioned the U.S. I think that is another place where we, in this country, make a mistake. We tend to look at what Washington does, and it does not do very much lately. I chair the Canada-U.S. inter-parliamentary group, and it just does not. It is not getting anything done.

At the state level, the U.S. is making progress. They are ahead of us in many sectors, and on greenhouse gas reductions in many states. We have to focus on the end result. That is what this bill does: It sets the stage. We have further meat to put on the bones, there is no question about that.

However, I am pleased the member is supportive. Does the member have any other ideas that we should be using to put meat on the bones?

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Malpeque for the work that he does to make sure Canada-U.S. relations are maintained.

I would like to go back to my speech. I talked about this bill being a starting point. The really unfortunate part about this bill is that the government is putting the onus on future governments. The first time it actually has to be accountable and reply as to whether it has made progress will be in 2030. Maybe the hon. member will be here in 2030, but I certainly hope the Liberal government will not be here in 2030.

That is to say that this is more of a starting point, and I look forward to what the minister said, in terms of bringing in the action plan so that we can evaluate that.

To be absolutely clear, I am just going to make a recommendation to the member. He is much more experienced than I, but it is a really bad idea to be planting trees at this time of year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. As much as we often disagree, we can also agree.

I agree with him when he says that we must work together to improve this bill. I agree with him when he says that the oil and gas industry must play a role in getting to net-zero emissions. In fact, it is this very industry that must make the transition. Quebec and Canadian taxpayers' money must be used for the energy transition and to create good, green jobs for our friends out west.

Government Orders

Since my colleague is not satisfied with Bill C-12 and the government's climate change ambitions, will he commit to voting for Bill C-215, the bill I introduced on climate change accountability?

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, I have spoken on the member's bill, and I certainly appreciate her intervention today and her advocacy to represent her province. I want to represent my province as well.

I would simply say that this is, as I said, a bit of a *Seinfeld* bill. It is a bill about nothing. There is some reporting that it needs to have happen at certain junctures.

What we want to start with today, and I asked the minister this earlier, is with the minister acknowledging that oil and gas not only have a tremendous history and have made a tremendous contribution to our social, economic, fiscal and technological base in this country, but they have a strong future. The government has to factor those in.

I want the bill to be amended to specifically cite that. I also want the minister to say that Canadian energy will be part of the decision-making and the advice that he will be receiving. We are a long way from Calgary and we are a long way from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and we need to be in sync with them. They are the ones that are going to be putting in the real work, the real technology that will help us make our 2030 and 2050 targets.

• (1625)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my neighbour for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola for his history of the complete inaction of previous governments, both Liberal and Conservative, on climate action. He mentioned the carbon tax in British Columbia. That was brought in by the B.C. Liberals, a party I know he supports.

Getting back to the federal Liberals, they have had five years to do something about climate action. They have been talking a lot, and now they come up with a bill that says we will not have a target until 2030. They have been here for five years. Why do they not have a target for 2025 and why do they not have it now? They are not even going to make a 2030 target for the next six months.

I would ask the member if the Conservatives will support the NDP in calling for an amendment to make a 2025 target part of the bill?

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate my neighbour and respect the people he serves. I was once a representative for that area.

Upon taking office, the B.C. NDP did make major changes, structural changes, to the LNG industry, specifically lowering taxes, so it could start that industry, and I agree with that. Sometimes we need to make it really juicy for industry to put in big money for a long-term benefit, not just to British Columbia with respect to investment but to Canada as well. It is also to get the cleanest LNG in the world out to market to displace dirty coal, and that is a really important thing.

The member seems to think that somehow I know what is on the Liberal minister's mind. He seems to think that the minister and I are somehow in sync. The member should probably ask those questions of the Liberal government rather than to me.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was a pleasure to listen to my colleague's excellent speech. It strikes me, in the context of this debate, that we as the Conservatives really are the only truly national party. We are trying to bring Canadians together from all parts of the country. The Liberals have no representation in the west. We have parties that only run candidates in some regions. There are different forces that are trying to say that the aspirations of the west are irreconcilable with the aspirations of other Canadians.

As Conservatives, we believe we can have a strong, united country that respects all our industries, that understands the importance of defending the environment, of having a strong energy sector, of defending the French language and of bringing our country together from coast to coast.

I wonder if the member has a comment on the particular role we are playing in Parliament, taking a nuanced approach to these issues and trying to bring our country together.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, the member raises rightly a big concern. Many people are concerned about where they will get their paycheques to put food on the table in many places in Alberta, Saskatchewan and even parts of Manitoba.

We expect more from the government to ensure that all provinces and territories are not just respected but that their workers are as well. I expect the government, especially when the minister says he will collaborate with other parties, to take our suggestions not just to heart but put them in the bill.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is certainly a red-letter day for climate legislation when the hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola will vote for it and I cannot.

Is the member now prepared to agree that we need carbon pricing? As the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay pointed out a moment ago, we have had carbon pricing in British Columbia, and it came in from a right-wing government.

Carbon pricing actually emanates from right-wing think tanks in the U.S. It does work. We need carbon pricing. Will the hon. member support the current efforts of the current government?

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, if I had another 20 minutes for my speech, I certainly would have touched on that.

The fact is that when the government brought in its national carbon tax, it hid the cost. One of the areas I would like to see in any potential action plan, particularly, is the fiscal and social economic impacts, basically, what is the bill and who will pay it?

Unfortunately, those men and women have been in office for well over five years and they have yet to be transparent with Canadians or their representatives. This is just another—

• (1630)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House and talk about the environment and climate change. I was eager to see this bill tabled. We waited a long time for it.

At the Bloc Québécois, we even took the initiative and tabled our own climate accountability bill, Bill C-215, which we debated here in the House a few weeks ago and which seems to have a few more teeth than Bill C-12, an act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050.

Let us talk about Bill C-12. There are several interesting terms in it, like “transparency”, “accountability” and “net-zero emissions”. I have to admit, it is certainly a good first step. The government is taking this further than probably any other government before it. However, the reality is that, when you read the bill, you soon realize that it is nowhere near sufficient to address the climate emergency.

I will say it right out of the gate: Bill C-12 is dishearteningly tame. It needs to be more binding. If the Liberals are serious in their desire to protect the environment, ensure a green future for the next generation, implement a fair, green economic recovery plan, put an end to the cycle of broken promises and missed targets on greenhouse gas reductions and respect their commitment made around the Paris Agreement, they will surely be open to amending and enhancing the bill to make it more binding.

The emergency is real, and the health and financial crisis we are experiencing should not be an excuse for setting aside the climate crisis and the measures required to address it. Canada's performance in reducing greenhouse gases leaves much to be desired. I would even say that it is embarrassing. Canada has never met its targets. It had to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol and will likely not meet the Paris Agreement targets. If it could, the government would have put that in the bill and shown more boldness and ambition. It would perhaps have been a little less concerned about 2050 and a little more about 2030. It would certainly be more concerned about the importance of meeting our international commitments than honouring its own election promises.

Climate change should not be a partisan issue. Unfortunately, that is what we are seeing with this bill. During the 2019 election campaign, the Liberals promised to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 and they are repeating that promise with this bill, without telling us how they are going to do it.

Government Orders

I want to act in good faith, but Bill C-12 is so easy to criticize, even for the government. According to Environment Canada's most optimistic projections, we will miss the 2030 target. We must stop burying our heads in the sand; Canada will not achieve its emission reduction target of 30% by 2030. We are a whopping 77 megatonnes short, even if we take into account the impact of the reduction measures that have been announced.

When you are about to miss a target, your logical priority should be to do everything in your power to quickly rectify the situation, reverse course and preach by example. The Bloc Québécois is not the only one to say this; environmental groups are saying the same thing. The Association québécoise de lutte contre la pollution atmosphérique says that the bill is extremely vague and not particularly binding, and that it shows that the Government of Canada has not done the work since 2015. Like us, they are still waiting for a serious and responsible commitment on the part of the Liberal government.

We are hearing the same thing from the Climate Action Network, Ecojustice, Environmental Defence Canada, the West Coast Environmental Law Association and Équiterre, although I am not naming any names.

I will say it again: Canada failed to meet any of its international climate targets. In its current form, Bill C-12 provides very little guarantee that this trend will change.

We know that we want to move toward a net-zero economy and way of life, but we still do not know how to get there. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to realize that it will take more than one or two somewhat stringent measures to get there. For now, we have no idea whether the most polluting industries will have targets to meet, which is regrettable, whether we are moving toward the electrification of transportation or whether we will support some form of circular economy. We do not know any of this because there is no plan.

With Bill C-12, the Liberals are asking us to vote on a plan we have not seen yet. For now, what we know is that we will probably achieve net-zero emissions in 2050, even if we do not really know what that looks like.

• (1635)

Now is the time for concrete measures that will actually help reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

The bill must ensure real accountability, not only for meeting the targets that are already on the table, but for aligning Canada with the Paris Agreement and its ultimate goal of limiting average global warming to 1.5°C.

Government Orders

It is crucial that Canada have a five-year accountability cycle, that it start in 2025, not 2030 or 2050, and that it align with the Paris Agreement's five-year inventory cycle and its goal of raising the stakes. That is the demand of every environmental group worth its salt and every individual who believes in the need for energy transition to ensure our survival on this planet.

I have trouble understanding the government's lack of ambition and initiative with respect to Bill C-12. We should be past the point where we need to plan for an energy transition. In fact, we should be making the transition now, because 2050 is in the future.

We have to be realistic; the solution to the economic, health and climate emergencies does not lie in the perpetuation of an oil-based economy. We need to invest in natural resource processing, research and innovation in our institutions and the production of our own clean, renewable energy.

We must admit that Quebec has a lot to offer in this area. That is where our wealth lies; Canada's wealth lies elsewhere. That is why, we in the Bloc Québécois think that the government should provide substantial assistance for the energy and economic transition of certain provinces toward a sustainable wealth creation model.

Economic development based on green technologies, such as biomass, wind and solar energy, hydroelectricity and geothermal energy can sustainably fuel progress and it can certainly be used as a model.

The Bloc Québécois can propose a number of concrete measures. In this bill, we would have liked to see a plan outlining concrete measures for achieving our goals.

I want to get back to the Climate Action Network. I could not agree more with their desire to decarbonize the economy. It is an interesting concept that is now more relevant than ever. People often say that the environment should go hand in hand with the economy; you cannot have one without the other.

I had an interesting conversation recently with Paul Fauteux, an environmental lawyer who was the director general of Environment Canada's Climate Change Bureau and co-head of the Canadian delegation to the international negotiations on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. He is an optimist, but he is disappointed with the government's inaction. We were discussing the fact that we should not be afraid of the energy transition and that we should not see it as bad for the economy or as a destroyer of high-paying jobs.

The opposite is true. Moving away from fossil fuels will result in net gains in employment. Whether for installing solar panels or renovating homes to adapt them to climate change and make them more energy efficient, the potential is huge.

However, decarbonizing the economy does not only mean that we are trading oil industry jobs for jobs in the solar and wind energy industry. We can build a low-carbon caring economy.

Some members may be wondering what a caring economy is. It is an economy where we care for the planet as much as we care for each other. The lowest-carbon jobs are the ones that do not extract anything from the land, that do not create any new waste and that have a limited impact on the environment. These jobs, often performed by women, need to be more highly valued. This work of

caring for the most vulnerable members of our communities must be better understood. As part of our economic transition, care work needs to be become a good job, with union benefits, fair pay and safety protections.

Last Sunday, Laure Waridel, an associate professor with the Institute of Environmental Sciences at the Université du Québec à Montréal, said that it will take profound change, binding measures, systematic measures, because we are at the point where we have to completely transform the economy.

We are driven by development. This development brings in money, of course, but it is costly in terms of greenhouse gases. There is a cost, not just an environmental one, but also a social one, and that is fundamental.

The problem is that we are individualistic and think only of ourselves. The government is certainly not setting a good example. We need to stop working in isolation. We need to join forces. That is how we will build a society that is a bit greener and a bit fairer. In fact, I hope it will be a lot greener and fairer.

● (1640)

For that to happen, we need a government that can put partisanship aside and stop with the hypocrisy. It needs to walk the talk, as we say. A government cannot claim it wants to achieve net-zero emissions and in the same breath say that it will make the Keystone XL pipeline a priority in its relations with the United States. That makes no sense. It is literally an example of saying one thing but doing another. The government needs to choose between investing in the future and driving straight into a wall. I am sure members would agree that the right choice is to invest in the future. However, this cannot happen without real measures to reduce our carbon footprint.

Even the Canada Energy Regulator has projected that if Canada strengthens its climate policies to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions, neither the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion nor the new Keystone XL pipeline will be necessary. That is interesting.

Why does the government stubbornly support projects that are harmful to the environment? These projects are not even embraced by the new U.S. administration. These projects are not sustainable in the long term, as current events constantly remind us.

A group of over 100 economists and natural resources experts from all across Canada recently urged the government to abandon Trans Mountain before sinking any more of taxpayers' money into it. As I was saying earlier, this money should instead be used to accelerate the transition to a greener economy, particularly in Alberta, Canada's leading oil producer. We need to be far more aggressive in immediately transitioning away from oil and gas.

Government Orders

The International Energy Agency recently calculated that the demand for oil should drop by 30% over the next two decades if the countries that signed the Paris Agreement on climate change respect their commitments. The oil-based economy is no longer viable in the long term, and experts are doing all they can to remind us of that.

On Monday, the World Meteorological Organization published a report showing that, despite the brief decline in greenhouse gas emissions because of the COVID-19 crisis, concentrations of these same gases have reached record highs. Once again, these data show that urgent action must be taken because, as greenhouse gases continue to rise, the social and economic costs of inaction rise with them.

This could not be any clearer. We have to rework Bill C-12 to give it more teeth because the way this bill is currently worded, it does not measure up. The government has to work with the opposition to improve its bill by adding a target for 2025, a more ambitious goal for 2030, and a requirement to meet the targets instead of simply preparing to present reports that will outline yet another failure.

Again, the mandatory target for 2030, in other words Canada's commitment under the Paris Agreement, should be enshrined in law, and unfortunately, that is not currently the case.

I will come back to the particularly important words that the bill puts forward: "transparency", "accountability". The one that seems to be missing is responsibility. Instead of making the government responsible to Parliament, this bill wants to make the Minister of Environment and Climate Change the one who sets the interim targets. Clause 11 even gives him the right to amend the targets and emissions reduction plan.

If the minister and the government think that they will not be able to meet their greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, all they have to do is amend the targets and once again become fake climate champions. The government could change its targets to suit lobby and industry groups. That is not a serious approach.

The only limits that Bill C-12 imposes on the government, if it decides to amend the established targets somewhere along the way, is that it must consult its own federal ministers and provide an opportunity for comment to the public, the provinces and territories, indigenous groups, and advisory bodies created by the government itself.

Consulting an advisory body is good, but it is not the same thing as evaluating the measures and the progress towards the goal. Can these really be called limits? No. In addition, the minister reserves the right to choose which comments to share with civil society. The advisory bodies are window dressing, just like the role of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development in the bill. The bill does not even have the commissioner assess the minister's action plan based on progress towards the Paris targets. Once again, with no independent authority to assess the targets, tools and progress, this is not a serious approach.

We need a climate bill in which achievement of targets no longer depends solely on the will of the government of the day. The government must be accountable for its climate action. It must answer

to the thousands of people who are counting on it simply to ensure healthy living conditions on Earth in a future that is nearer than we think.

● (1645)

I will give another example of the government's lack of seriousness when it comes to accountability. According to clause 16, the minister himself will state, in his own report, the reasons for failing to meet the target and the actions taken to address the failure. That means that the minister will be assessing his own performance. Self-assessment: is that what the Liberals' commitment to transparency comes to?

According to Bill C-12, the reports on the targets, whether or not they are achieved, must be submitted to Parliament and made public. That is fine. However, once again, there is a big loophole, because nothing in this bill requires that the content of the reports be assessed by an independent authority.

We have a lot of work to do, and I sincerely hope that every party in the House will collaborate to improve this bill and make it a truly binding text that will make all of our constituents proud. I am thinking of the mothers who are fighting on the front lines for their children's future, and the young people who are taking to the streets and to our courtrooms to demand that we fulfill our commitments. They are the people to whom the government should be accountable.

That is why I introduced my bill, Bill C-215. We need a transparent, accountable government. We need to measure progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions based on targets. Let's talk about my bill, because I hope that the government and the other parties will be inspired to set stronger limits on the governments that take office between now and 2050, no matter their political stripe. I believe that is the approach we must take. Once and for all, we must pass climate legislation that does not change with the political party in power. The climate emergency demands it.

With Bill C-215, we are proposing to require that the government announce the suite of measures that it plans to take to reach its targets. The government would thus be accountable as soon as the bill is passed, and it would have to respond publicly if it failed.

With Bill C-215, we would entrench in Canadian law our international commitments under the Paris Agreement and make them mandatory in Canada. It is essential that we do so. Bill C-215 also requires the government to establish additional measures to ensure that its action plan meets the requirements of this act. If not, the government must inform and explain to the House why it failed to do so.

Government Orders

Under Bill C-215, the minister's action plan must include interim targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to be achieved by 2025, 2030, 2035 and 2040, measures to be taken to achieve these targets, the method for calculating Canadian greenhouse gas emissions, tools or instruments for measuring the progress made and tools for assessing the impact of emission reductions. Those are what I call real constraints.

Of course my Bloc Québécois colleagues and I support climate legislation, but we think it must have truly binding measures so that future governments have the legislative tools they need to stay on course for a healthy and hopefully carbon-neutral future, a future in which, most importantly, greenhouse gas emissions will be significantly lower, not just compensated for by bogus measures.

Regardless of whether we are in government or in opposition, as parliamentarians, we must do better. As I said, the climate crisis must not be a partisan issue. That said, I am very much looking forward to studying this bill in committee. I do have reservations, but climate legislation is crucial. I am impressed with the minister's involvement on this file. I know he wants to ensure a healthy future for the next generation.

The legislative process presents a perfect opportunity to establish the robust accountability framework we need to ensure that Canada meets its international commitments and to support the aggressive action needed to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Let's work together towards that goal.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really did enjoy the member's remarks. I think there are lots of suggestions coming from them.

This bill is quite different in my experience. I really do think that this bill opens up a lot of opportunity for the committee to do a lot of work and bring forward its suggestions, rather than the minister having an absolute fixed position. I really hope that is the way it goes because the bill basically sets out the targets. I will agree with the member that there do have to be ways of ensuring that targets are met. We have heard some suggestions at the finance committee quite often: home renovation; solar; small modular reactors, and so on.

All I am saying is that I enjoyed the member's remarks. I do hope that the committee gets seized with the issues and provides strong suggestions, rather than the government coming in with a fixed position, and that the government does listen to the suggestions that come from the committee.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his kind remarks, which I will now address.

I did hear a particularly interesting comment on Bill C-12. I was told that after a rather, well, careful reading, it was found to be empty. The good news is, a bill that is empty can be infinitely and generously improved. The minister is a good listener, which will be helpful. The Conservatives, the NDP and the Bloc will all be able to amend this bill and make it more binding. The most common

criticism is that it is not sufficiently binding. Canada has made international commitments. Some people do not realize the importance of integrating these commitments into Canadian law, meeting the targets and taking responsibility if our efforts fail.

I look forward to the opportunity to propose a number of improvements at committee.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her speech. She is a very active participant in the debates in the House.

She talked about the oil sector. With regard to the environment, people in my province were surprised to learn of cases in Montreal when raw sewage was dumped into the St. Lawrence Seaway. We all have to work harder to do more for the environment.

Does my colleague agree with the efforts to prevent the disposal of sewage in this way?

Does she think the provinces should be allowed to set their own carbon tax policy?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for making an effort to speak French; it is appreciated.

He asked some very interesting questions that I will certainly discuss with him, but this debate is about Bill C-12.

Unlike the previous government, this government is committed to addressing climate change and achieving net-zero emissions. That is important to note. Our commitments must be substantial. We must take concrete action and have a plan to vote on, not a promise of a future plan. We are being asked to wait another 10 years before we have a real plan and targets. What we want is to have one now.

I would be happy to discuss it with him.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my Bloc colleague for the introduction of her private member's bill, Bill C-215, and her passion and advocacy for climate accountability.

In Bill C-215, there is a much bigger role for the environment commissioner. In the government's bill, the environment commissioner is tasked with only doing one report every five years. My question is not only whether the member thinks that this should be improved upon and that the environment commissioner needs a bigger role, but given that we just found out the environment commissioner does not currently have enough resources and staffing to do current environmental work, does the member agree that we need to make the environment commissioner an independent officer of Parliament, so he or she would have their own budget, staffing and resources?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

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I know that she or one of her colleagues moved a motion in the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to give more powers to the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development. We in the Bloc Québécois are more or less in agreement with that.

As I was saying earlier, in this bill, the role of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is almost window dressing. The commissioner is not really given much power. Even if the minister is wrong or the targets are not met, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development cannot do much.

A panel of experts is established. Again, it is the government that decides who sits on this panel. Clearly, there is a lot more work to be done in terms of accountability.

I look forward to working with my colleague on this issue in committee.

• (1655)

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech.

The Liberals have said that they are open, but unfortunately I have come to the same conclusion as my colleague. This bill contains nothing but rhetoric and would not accomplish much, which is unfortunately not uncommon for the Liberals.

Since they seem to be open, I want to give my colleague an opportunity to speak. In an ideal world, we would like Bill C-215 to be adopted. If we could take provisions from Bill C-215 and put them in Bill C-12, what are my colleague's top two measures to include? Could she describe them to the House?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the opportunity to speak more to Bill C-215.

It is not complicated. As I was saying, we are being asked to vote on a plan that does not yet exist. Bill C-215 calls on the minister to develop a real plan with concrete measures to achieve our greenhouse gas reduction targets and tools to measure the progress made. I am talking about accountability here as well. The government must be accountable to the public. People want to know where we stand with our reduction targets. They want to know if these targets have been met and what needs to be done.

We still do not know whether the polluting industries will have to respect draconian measures. We do not know whether a transportation electrification plan is in the works. We do not know all of the measures that could be taken to reduce our carbon footprint. They could easily be integrated into Bill C-12.

These are the gems I would take from Bill C-215 and add to Bill C-12.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

I want to confirm that I support this private member's bill, which is clearly more robust than Bill C-12. I agree with my colleague from the Bloc Québécois. We do not need new Keystone or Trans Mountain pipelines.

I have just one question for my colleague. What are the most important aspects of her bill that she thinks should be included in the amendments to Bill C-12?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her kind words and her support for my bill.

As I was saying, I think it is important for the government to be accountable. The review and accountability processes in this bill need to be improved. Under the bill in its current form, the minister can not only set and change targets, he also gets to evaluate his own performance.

We need to take a step back, consult scientists and experts and make the government accountable for the measures it takes on climate action. All of that needs to be included in Bill C-12.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will address the second question. I think it is very important. It has to do with the issue of jurisdictions, which comes into play in our response to climate change.

Does the hon. member think that the provinces can have the freedom to choose their own policies when it comes to the carbon tax or does she think that the federal government can legitimately impose the process associated with the carbon tax?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

That is a tricky question. A Bloc MP would never say that the federal government should overrule Quebec, for example.

In terms of the environment, I know that my colleague and I have different opinions. The issue may be somewhat more delicate. I invite him to discuss this immediately after the sitting. We could perhaps come to an agreement.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, climate accountability legislation is so important. Why is it important? I had a question asked of me a few times this week by journalists. They asked why people should care about this. When I say we have missed every international climate target we have set, every single one, it does not really get to the heart of what is happening. We are so used to broken promises. We are so used to a government telling us we are on track, that it is taking action and that it understands the urgency, when its actions and urgency in no way match the scale of the crisis we are facing.

Why does this matter? For one thing, it is because we are stealing the future from our children. The young people know it, and they should not have to feel that fear. They should not have to march in the streets because politicians are not protecting their futures.

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Before I ran for office, I taught a course at the University of Victoria that covered climate change and social movements. I remember that during one of the breaks, a young woman in my class came up with to me tears in her eyes. She asked me how she should study and work on the things we were talking about when scientists are telling us that we have a decade to turn this around. She said that if we fail, it means the collapse of ecosystems, mass extinctions and millions of people dying, along with our food systems and our future. We talked about how we maintain hope, how we make space to grieve and how to tap into fear and pain while continuing to fight for a livable planet. She went on to help organize climate strikes in Victoria.

Her wisdom and leadership, and the wisdom and leadership of kids across Canada and around the world, often bring me to tears. They motivate me to action.

What this young woman was doing was listening to the science and looking at the challenges we face, straight on. She was seeing and feeling the urgency. When people do that, when they choose not to look away and let themselves feel the real threat of what we are facing, what our children are facing and what it means for their futures, it is devastating, heartbreaking and terrifying. If people are willing to stay with that feeling, then they have no choice but to act and no choice but to act with the urgency that matches the crisis.

When Greta Thunberg said to world leaders, “How dare you...look away”, this is what she was talking about, and given that the government has put forward a bill that puts off climate accountability for the next 10 years, I can only assume that the Prime Minister, the Minister of Environment and every Liberal MP are choosing to look away. Maybe they do so because it is politically inconvenient to feel. Maybe they do so because it is unparliamentary to show emotions while debating legislation. Maybe they do so because it is scary to stand up, speak out, act with courage and face the consequences. However, whatever the reason, I say, “How dare you look away.”

However, it is not too late. We could still turn this small step in the right direction into something meaningful and real, and something that would give those young people some hope that the politicians who have so often betrayed them feel the urgency and are going to do something to turn this around.

We could still amend the bill to put in a milestone target of 2025. We could strengthen the accountability measures in the bill. We could ensure that the targets we set are in line with the best available science, our international obligations and equity principles.

● (1700)

I encourage every member, especially those on the government side of the House, not to look away and to take a moment to feel the scale of the crisis we are facing, the urgency. I hope they will work with us to make the bill something our children can be proud of.

In that spirit, I want to go through the parts of the bill I was really glad to see and then the parts that are missing.

I will mention the top three pieces that I appreciate about the bill. First, putting a commitment to net zero by 2050 into law is essen-

tial. The bill would not only ensure that the net-zero target is put into law, but also ensure we legislate our other long-term targets. Second, it was good to see the bill explicitly name the government’s commitment to upholding section 35 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Third, I am glad there would be progress reporting two years before each milestone target, with an opportunity to adjust and take additional actions if we are off track.

When it comes to the things that are missing, of course the most egregious omission is the lack of any real accountability for the next 10 years and the glaring omission of a 2025 milestone target. Scientists have been clear that this decade is the most important. The next 10 years are the ones the IPCC says are crucial if we want to have any hope of avoiding catastrophic climate change.

It is hard to wrap my head around how the government can put forward a climate accountability bill that would put off and avoid accountability for the most important 10 years. It is hard for me to understand how Liberal members of Parliament, especially those with children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, can stand behind the bill, how they can look young people in the eyes and tell them they have to wait another decade. It is an easy fix: Put in a 2025 milestone target.

The second big gap is in the need for stronger accountability mechanisms, both with the arm’s-length advisory body, which only gives advice right now but does not have a defined role in assessments or reviewing progress, and with the environment commissioner, who, in the bill, would only have to do one report every five years. Neither of these bodies have the capacity or mandate in the bill to properly hold the government to account.

As it stands, the minister is mainly accountable to himself. The government determines what targets should be set, opening up the opportunity to set weak targets, and whether the government is on track to meeting those targets.

To fix these issues we need to strengthen and clearly define the advisory body’s role in establishing targets, reviewing climate plans and evaluating progress reports and assessment reports. We also must guarantee that this body is composed of independent experts from all regions of Canada, and that it includes indigenous and worker representatives and does not include fossil fuel executives or industry representatives.

These fixes would strengthen the advisory body, but we also need to ensure the environment commissioner is reporting on whether our targets are in line with the best available science, whether our climate plan will actually get us to our target, whether our progress report and the assessment report are accurate and whether our proposed corrective actions are adequate for addressing the times when we are not on track.

The environment commissioner could play an important role in this legislation, but we learned last week that the environment commissioner currently does not have the resources to do its regular environmental work, and that its staff and environmental experts can be reallocated to other projects by the Auditor General. We need to make the environment commissioner an independent officer of Parliament.

The third gap is the fact the government has given itself up to nine months, after the bill gets royal assent, to set a target for 2030 and therefore create a plan to meet that target.

• (1705)

This means it could be up to a year from now until we see a plan to reach our 2030 target, yet in the Liberal government's most recent throne speech, the Liberals said they would immediately bring forward a plan to exceed Canada's 2030 climate goal. They said "immediately". I do not know who defines "a year later" as "immediately". I feel like we need to remind the government, again, that a plan to create a plan is not a plan.

We know that climate accountability means nothing without climate action, so where is the government's climate action plan? When will we see the new target that exceeds our 2030 climate goals, and when will we see the plan to get us there? We need to see investments in green infrastructure, in transportation, in building retrofits and in building green affordable housing. We need a just and sustainable recovery, a green new deal that creates good family-sustaining jobs in the low-carbon economy. We need a just transition for workers, and all of this needs to be outlined in a climate plan that will get us to our targets, ones that are ambitious and that are based on keeping the global temperature rise below 1.5°C.

There are a number of gaps that I will not cover in as much detail, but we should be talking about carbon budgets instead of milestone targets, about Canada's fair-share contribution to 1.5°C, and we should be requiring the minister to meet strong standards when setting targets, as well as strong standards when creating and adjusting plans. Currently, the bill would allow future governments to set weak targets and create plans without much detail. If we fail at strengthening the bill, we have to tell young people and tell Canadians that we were not courageous enough to put the measures in place to avoid catastrophic climate change, that we were not courageous enough to protect their future.

For most of this speech, I have been speaking about the future and the severe consequences of our present action and inaction. That future outlined in the IPCC report is scary, but this is not just about our future. The impacts of the climate crisis are already being felt in Canada. In my riding of Victoria and in B.C., it was not too long ago that we were choking on the smoke from the climate fires south of the border. We know that temperatures in Canada are increasing at twice the global rate. The impacts are felt particularly in

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the Arctic along the coasts, and are disproportionately felt by indigenous, rural, marginalized and racialized communities. Canadians want real action on the climate crisis, and they want a government that not only promises to fight climate change but will actually deliver on that promise.

When I say, again and again, that our government has missed every single climate target and that the current Liberal government is not even on track to meet Stephen Harper's weak targets, I hope that the members in this chamber feel the seriousness of this failure, that they do not look away and that they feel the urgency. We need climate accountability now, not in 10 years. We need climate action now, not in nine months to a year.

It was back in 2008 that the United Kingdom created its climate accountability framework, the Climate Change Act. This act was the first of its kind in the U.K., and it remains highly regarded and has served as a model for legislation in other jurisdictions, including Sweden, New Zealand, Denmark, France, Germany and Spain. The U.K. has set five-year carbon budgets covering immediately from 2008 onward, and regular reporting to Parliament has enhanced transparency and accountability. The U.K. also has an expert advisory committee, the Committee on Climate Change, that is much stronger than the advisory body proposed by the current government.

• (1710)

Two years before the U.K. implemented this bill, in 2006, Jack Layton, the leader of the NDP at the time, originally introduced the first climate accountability act in Canada. The bill passed at third reading by a vote of 148 to 116. The Harper Conservatives voted against it, but the bill died in the Senate. The NDP has introduced the climate change accountability act as a private member's bill in the 39th, 40th and 41st Parliament, by Jack but also by former MP Megan Leslie.

Imagine where we would be if we had passed strong climate accountability legislation back then. Since implementing climate accountability, the U.K. has successfully reduced its emissions over the past decade, in stark contrast to Canada, whose emissions continue to increase despite the government's empty words and claims to climate leadership.

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In this Parliament, my NDP colleagues, the member for Winnipeg Centre and the member for Elmwood—Transcona, have both put forward legislation in Parliament that calls for strong climate accountability. I want to thank my Bloc colleague for introducing Bill C-215.

I want to highlight one important piece of the member for Winnipeg Centre's bill, Bill C-232, an act respecting a climate emergency action framework. It provides for the development and implementation of a climate emergency action framework. It explicitly outlines how a climate emergency action framework and climate accountability legislation must be built on a foundation that recognizes the indigenous inherent right to self-government, that upholds the provisions in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and that takes into account scientific knowledge including indigenous science and knowledge as well as the responsibilities toward future generations.

While I was glad to see that the government included a commitment to upholding section 35 in UNDRIP in the preamble of the bill, so far the Liberals have failed to enshrine UNDRIP into law. When will the government put action behind its words when it comes to reconciliation and put the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into law? We have a lot of work to do and we must come together if we want to do it.

As I wrap up, I want to note again that there can be no climate accountability without climate action. The government has missed every single climate target that it has set. Climate accountability is important, but the Liberals are not only putting it off for 10 years. They are also putting off a new target and a plan. They are putting off a climate action plan for up to another year. Where is the government's climate action plan? Part of that plan has to include an end to all fossil fuel subsidies. Stop giving away billions of dollars to profitable oil and gas companies. Stop throwing good money after bad at the Trans Mountain expansion. Please invest those billions of dollars in creating the good, sustainable jobs that people need right now.

We need investments in green infrastructure, in transportation and in building retrofits. We need a just and sustainable recovery, a green new deal, one that creates good jobs in a low-carbon economy. We need a plan that is based on science and in line with keeping global temperatures below 1.5°C.

We must move forward with climate action and climate accountability legislation immediately. We needed it in 2006 when Jack Layton first put it forward and Jack would not want us to wait another 10 years for climate accountability. We needed it in each iteration of the IPCC report. We needed it when we read about the catastrophic impacts of global warming. We needed it last year when young people were marching in the streets, begging politicians, begging decision-makers to listen to the science, to not look away, and we need it now.

• (1715)

I will be pushing the government to make this bill stronger. We cannot afford to wait any longer. We are running out of time. Young people and Canadians are watching us, and they will not forgive us if we fail them, if we lack the courage to do what is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change. They are telling us to wake up.

• (1720)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am really shocked by what I thought I heard. I am going to ask the hon. member to clarify what she said.

I heard that if there is to be an advisory committee or an advisory board that we should specifically exclude the oil and gas sector from that. This, to me, is offensive on two levels. First, that sector would probably be the most impacted by any substantive changes to our climate change approach. It would seem that it would simply be unfair to exclude their voice from the consideration of things that should be done. Second, from things that I have read, that sector has in fact outperformed just about any other in Canada when it comes to dealing with climate change.

How can the member justify excluding such an important sector in such an unfair way?

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, perhaps the Liberal member did mishear me. I said we need representation from workers and that includes workers in the fossil fuel industry. It includes workers who are impacted.

What I would like to avoid is having industry representatives and fossil fuel executives driving our climate plan. I think Canadians can understand why we no longer want to be listening to the fossil fuel industries and the big oil and gas companies that have been making millions of dollars while also receiving billions of dollars in handouts from the government.

We need to not only take a strong stand to stand up for workers and to create a responsible climate plan, but also to stop handing out billions of dollars in fossil fuel subsidies to these profitable oil and gas companies.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy the fanciful tales from my colleague, the member for Victoria. It is always an interesting world the New Democrats live in, where somehow they get here to Ottawa magically in an airplane, but they are against the energy sector. It is really interesting.

New Democrats are always saying that \$200 billion in subsidies is being given to the oil and gas sector. I would love for her to table that document, where it shows \$200 billion in subsidies, and I am assuming she means per year, to the oil and gas sector. Could the member table that?

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Also, I would love to know how the member feels about the 900 billion litres of raw sewage her city has dumped into the Pacific Ocean since 2013. Divers in Victoria have said that right off the coast, the ocean floor is littered with garbage, but when they go further out, the ocean becomes more beautiful and more vibrant. As a former city councillor, the member should really work on cleaning up her backyard instead of looking down her nose at the oil and gas sector in western Canada.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, I encourage the member across the way to look at the reports that outline the fossil fuel subsidies. I would be happy to email the member a copy of those reports.

It is important to note that the reason we are here, the reason we are at this point where young people are marching in the streets, where Canadians across this country are demanding climate action, is the failure of consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments. We went through the Harper years, the years with no climate action, with no real protection of our oceans and our coastal ecosystems.

The member mentioned divers who are going off the coast of Victoria. We are very concerned about the environment. We are very concerned about climate change. I think that concern is shared by Canadians across the country. It is disappointing that the Conservatives continue to focus on individual actions, rather than acknowledging that this Liberal government—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Shefford.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Victoria for her passionate speech.

I would like to know what she thinks of the fact that the fight against climate change could be the driving force behind the creation of a sustainable and green economy and a fairer and greener post-COVID recovery. According to a 2019 nationwide study, more women than men have decided to take action on climate change. Groups such as Femmessor and Mothers Step In are demonstrating the growing interconnectedness of the feminist and the environmental movements advocating for the future of our children.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, I will answer the question around the opportunity for good green jobs in the low-carbon economy first. We know if we were to invest the billions that are being spent on the fossil fuel industry, the \$12 billion that is proposed for the Trans Mountain expansion project, into green infrastructure, clean energy and building retrofits, it would create hundreds of thousands of good jobs across the country in local communities.

I also want to touch on the other part of the question, which is about the connection between the women's movement and the environmental movement. We know women are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, both here in Canada and around the world. We also know that women have been leaders in a lot of these climate movements. I want to thank the member for bringing up that point.

• (1725)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Victoria for an incredible speech. She did her constituents proud with her interventions on Bill C-12.

The previous intervention from my Conservative colleague illustrates the complete disconnect that exists there with the impending challenge that is before us with respect to climate change. In order to make people like that understand the gravity of the situation, perhaps it would be informative to the House for the member for Victoria to put the costs in economic terms. In other words, what are the costs going to be to our economy? Never mind the ecological devastation; what will the economic costs be to Canada with respect to upgrading our infrastructure and adapting to a new climate if we do nothing? Perhaps that will make my Conservative colleagues finally understand the gravity of the situation before us.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for his insight.

It is the acknowledgement that the costs of inaction greatly outweigh the costs of investing in the kinds of good sustainable jobs we know Canadians need and are needed to meet our climate targets. There has been a lot of research, both globally and some here in Canada. One of the amendments I would like to see for this bill is for the advisory body to have a role in outlining those costs so we get updated annual reports on not only the costs of catastrophic climate change, both present and future, but also how we adapt our planning to adjust to some of these horrific things, like forest fires, flooding and increased severe weather events.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I also want to commend my hon. friend from Victoria for an excellent speech.

To my eternal horror, I have literally been working on this issue since 1986. I have seen the targets put in place and each time I can recite, chapter and verse, what particular event knocked us off course.

When we look at other countries, as the hon. member did, I want to draw attention to New Zealand's climate accountability act and the U.K. act. The U.K. act has bracketed carbon budgets, which this bill lacks, that are currently in the 2018 to 2022 carbon budget. The New Zealand act is newer, but it has put in place 2025 goals and carbon budgets.

I think it is terribly important that the government listen to the IPCC's 1.5° C special report of October 2018. I will ask my hon. friend, who is clearly familiar with it, to set out what we need to do before 2030 to avoid going above 1.5° C.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her ongoing advocacy with respect to the environment and addressing the climate crisis. This question is so important. Not only are we presenting the fact that the biggest gap in this bill is the missing 2025 milestone target, the missing progress report that would come before that and the missing accountability for the most important 10 years, but also what actions we need to take between now and 2030 if we want to avoid catastrophic climate change. Some of those things include investments in clean energy, retrofits and green infrastructure.

We also know we need to stop doing some things, such as pouring money into fossil fuel subsidies. We need to stop the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline. We need to put that money into solutions that will get us to our climate target and protect our future, and the future of our children and their children.

• (1730)

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, just for clarification, the member did imply that, when we talk about the net-zero advisory committee, the NDP would not want to have industry reps; and we are not talking about workers, we are talking about representatives of the industry. Is that the official position of the NDP?

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, I am curious if the member across the way does not consider that workers who are in the fossil fuel industry can represent that industry. Is he saying that only executives or officials from the company themselves can—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC) moved that Bill C-208, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (transfer of small business or family farm or fishing corporation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, it truly is a humbling moment to stand in this chamber and put one's name to legislation and ask one's colleagues to support it. As fate would have it, today marks the seventh anniversary of my representing Brandon—Souris since the by-election that took place on November 25, 2013.

Private members' bills give us the opportunity to set aside our political allegiances, to rise as parliamentarians and to champion the causes of issues whose time has come. In that spirit, I reached out to all the MPs in this House from other parties, to speak about this legislation back before the first reading. I want to specifically thank Guy Caron, who spearheaded this legislation in the last Parliament. Now it is up to us to pick up where he left off and pass it into law.

The essence of this bill is pretty straightforward. Bill C-208 would allow small businesses, farm families and family fishing corporations the same tax rate when selling their operations to a family member as they would if they sold it to a third party. Currently, when a person sells their small business to a family member, the difference between the sale price and the original purchase price is considered to be a dividend. However, if the business is sold to a non-family member, the sale is considered a capital gain. A capital gain is taxed at a much lower rate and allows the seller to use the lifetime capital gains exemption.

It is completely unacceptable that it is more financially advantageous for a parent to sell their farm or small business to an absolute stranger than it is to their own children. I want to give two specific examples this afternoon on how this legislation will help families transfer their operations when they decide to make that transition.

Imagine a bakery that a couple have owned for about 30 years. The couple running the bakery are now ready to retire and another bakery has reached out to indicate that they would like to purchase it from them. However, their daughter has worked with the couple throughout the years in that bakery as she has grown up and has indicated that she wants to take over the family business. Like a lot of small business owners and farmers, they could not afford to put large sums of money away into RRSPs and other saving vehicles, as any extra money that they had went into their own small business.

This couple would rely on the sale of the bakery to basically fund their retirement plans, so they call upon an accountant to start a conversation about different planning scenarios. Their accountant comes back to them, saying if they sold the bakery to the other company, rather than their daughter, they would have an effective tax rate of 10% after using their lifetime capital gains exemption. Their accountant also told them that if they sold the bakery to their daughter, she would be obligated to repay their loan with personal tax dollars, which is a significant penalty. Compared to selling their bakery to the other company, it would render the effective tax rate to be significantly higher. With that information in hand, they have a family huddle and discuss the options.

The couple is now seriously considering selling the business outside of the family as they do to want to put the burden of their tax obligation on their daughter. It would inhibit her ability to make a living and grow the business. On the sale of shares to the bakery, this couple should be indifferent to selling shares to their daughter or the other company. Their daughter should not be penalized for purchasing shares from her parents and should be able to fund the purchase with corporate funds, as she would if she were to purchase the business from an unrelated party.

Bill C-208 would allow the next generation to become business owners and to keep businesses locally owned. With this bill, Bill C-208, we can fix this injustice once and for all. Right now many small businesses are struggling. This pandemic has been one of the most disruptive times in our lifetime. Across our country, no community is immune from its impact. To those entrepreneurs who are listening to this speech tonight, I have their back. Anyone who has ever run their own business understands the massive responsibility and stress that comes with being one's own boss. They are risk takers and job creators. Small business owners make up the backbone of our economy.

• (1735)

From tradespeople to grocers, and everything in between, entrepreneurs are the pillars of our communities. It is not easy to start a business. Some people must take out massive loans just to get their doors open. They put everything on the line to make their operations a success. Hopefully, after many years of hard work, they slowly and surely pay off their debt, expand their business and create even more jobs in their own communities. They pour their hearts and souls into their businesses and, when they are ready to enjoy retirement, there would be no greater joy for them than to see what they built be transferred to their child or grandchild.

As a young entrepreneur, I was one of those who was able to carry on the legacy of my parents. In 1948, my mom and dad carved out a little slice of heaven and started our farm near Elgin, Manitoba. My brother and I are proud to be the sons of farmers.

In the words of Paul Harvey:

And on the 8th day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, "I need a caretaker." So God made a farmer. God said, "I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, milk cows, work all day in the fields, milk cows again, eat supper and then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the school board." So God made a farmer.

I learned a lot from my parents. There were times when they were incredibly tough. Sometimes commodity prices were in the basement. There were other times when equipment would break down just when it was needed the most. I know life is not always easy. It never has been, and it probably never will be.

However, the legislation we have before us today sends a strong message to all those family-run businesses that it will no longer be more financially advantageous to transfer a business or farm to a stranger than to their own children because of tax purposes.

The other example I want to give is of a farmer who is set to retire in the next couple of years and is reviewing succession options. The farmer wants his son to take over; however, he wants fair market value for his farm in order to fund his retirement, as well.

If a third party were to ask to purchase the shares of the farming company, the purchaser would be able to purchase those shares through a corporation. By selling his farm to this third party, the farmer could use his farm capital gain exemption on the sale, resulting in a 13.39% effective tax rate.

However, if the farmer sold his farm to his son, that sale would be recorded as a dividend, rather than a capital gain, and the farmer would pay 47.4% in tax. That is over 34% more in tax. I think we can all agree that it is completely unfair for the tax rate to be signif-

Private Members' Business

icantly higher when the farmer sells his operation to his son rather than to a third party who, in many cases, is a complete stranger.

Bill C-208 sends a message of hope to young farmers who want to carry on what their parents started. There is something special about being connected to the land and reaping what one sows, as is true for any small business. It is an attachment.

In Manitoba and other provinces, there are Century Farm Awards to celebrate farm families who have maintained continuous production for 100 years or more. Many of these in the Prairies are now well over 125 years. I have attended many centennial farm celebration ceremonies, and the faces of the family members involved show how important this milestone is for them.

Farm families face unique pressures in succeeding their operations, including the increasing cost of land, the average age of farm operators and the capital requirements for those entering the industry. The passage of this bill would eliminate the unfair tax rates that make it difficult to keep businesses under family ownership.

With that, I ask my colleagues to reach out to their constituents and ask them if they should support this legislation. Ask those constituents if they think it is unfair that selling a business to their children should be more expensive than selling to a stranger.

• (1740)

This legislation would impact every single constituency in Canada. From a family-run farm in Cumberland—Colchester to a family-run business in Winnipeg North or a fishing enterprise in Miramichi, people are looking to their members of Parliament to support this bill.

With that, I ask all members to join me in passing Bill C-208. By working together, we can support our entrepreneurs, small businesses, farmers and fishers who make up the backbone of our economy. Let us roll up our sleeves and get this job done.

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 congratulate the member on his seventh anniversary today.

I recognize the true value of our family farms. Not only today, but in the past, they have contributed so much to who we are as a nation and kept our rural identity very much alive.

Has my friend across the way had any discussions with the Department of Finance or the Department of Agriculture to get a sense of the potential cost we are talking about? Has there been any dialogue with respect to that?

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Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, yes, we have. We reached out, as Mr. Caron did before, to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who indicated that depending on the means and number of units that are sold, it could be anywhere from \$178 million to \$300 million annually. It would make a huge difference to each individual operation, leaving much more money in the hands of those people to spend on things that would contribute to society. It is not a complete cost, because a lot of that money would come back through taxes and purchases they would make for their daily lives.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for introducing this bill. It is obviously a bill that is important to us, and I will have the opportunity to talk about it later.

I want to thank him for this outpouring of love for our farmers, especially the next generation. However, is this not inconsistent with what we heard in the House at about the same time yesterday? Conservatives opposed the bill on the breach in supply management that was being defended by my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, among others.

How can Conservatives call themselves friends of the next generation of farmers when they attack them and do not want to protect supply management? There seems to be a disconnect.

[English]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, I have reached out on this particular bill to many of the member's colleagues. I did not have a chance to talk with him personally, but I talked with many Bloc members, NDP members, Green members and some of my colleagues in the Liberal Party to get the concentrated input that I have received on this particular bill. I thank him for his support.

As a former farm leader myself, which got me into politics, I can assure the member that there were times when I was looking at making sure we had choices of how to sell our wheat in the world and in western Canada. My colleague, Mr. Ritz, made a good choice in those days.

I was on the phone with the Chicken Farmers of Canada just yesterday. I have spoken with many of the dairy producers in Manitoba, and throughout Canada, a number of times on the particular issue that the member raised regarding supply management. I can assure him that my support for that industry has continued. We did it by making sure that when there was trade interference, there was a compensation package. The hon. member for Abbotsford designed that package with Prime Minister Harper. The big problem, which I just found out yesterday, is there has been no compensation to those supply-managed chicken producers in Canada in the last few years at all.

I can assure the member that we will continue to work together on that.

• (1745)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing forward the bill that Guy Caron worked so assiduously on in previous Parliaments. As the member knows and has indicated, it has been endorsed by independent business organizations that support small business and

agriculture and farming organizations. There is a lot of support for this bill. What we will do on the NDP side is endeavour to get it to committee.

I want to ask the member if he is willing to entertain amendments at the committee stage. There are some clarifications, as he is well aware, that would need to happen in terms of the legislation itself. Is he—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, we are running out of time and I would like to have the hon. member provide a brief answer.

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby is right that, among the Canadian Federation of Independent Business taxpayers, L'Union des producteurs agricoles and the Chicken Farmers of Canada, there is a broad base of support for this particular bill to go before the House.

We did spend a considerable amount of time working with Mr. Caron, when he was there before, in moving it forward. If there is anything that we could look at, we would certainly be willing to do that at committee, but I know Mr. Caron worked in great depth to get it to precisely the wording that he had in this bill.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I grew up on a small 50-acre farm and, in spite of having 11 labour-cost-free children, my father still required off-the-farm income because he realized it was not easy to feed 11 children with what we could produce on the farm.

I am pleased to take part in the debate today on private member's bill, Bill C-208, which aims to facilitate the transfer of family businesses between family members.

Ensuring the sustainability of small businesses, family farms and fishing corporations is essential to our economy and to the communities that they serve. This has been underscored by the critical need to support families and communities as we continue to fight COVID-19. Our government understands this. From the outset of the pandemic, Canada's economic response to COVID-19 has introduced a range of support measures for small businesses to help bridge them to the other side.

Simply put, we have their backs. That extends to helping family businesses thrive for generations to come.

Encouraging the sale of family businesses to family members often means those businesses will remain in, and continue to benefit, their communities as well as the families that fought hard, sacrificed and succeeded through pure determination and entrepreneurial spirit. It is with this spirit in mind that Bill C-208 bears careful consideration.

Bill C-208 seeks to amend two of the Income Tax Act's most important and complex anti-avoidance rules. These rules deal with inter-corporate dividends, share sales and circumstances under which the lifetime capital gains exemption is charged. Any relieving changes to these sections of the act must be done cautiously, following rigorous study and debate, to avoid unintentionally creating loopholes that would disproportionately benefit the wealthy instead of protecting the middle class and those working hard to join it.

Section 84.1 of the act, in particular, is in place to apply an anti-avoidance rule where, when appropriate, an individual sells shares of one corporation to another corporation that is linked to an individual, such as a family member. When an individual sells shares of a Canadian corporation to a linked corporation, section 84.1 of the act deems, in certain circumstances, that the individual has received a taxable dividend from the linked corporation rather than a capital gain. This prevents the individual from realizing the proceeds of the sale on a tax-free basis using the lifetime capital gains exemption.

This rule is meant to ensure that taxpayers cannot use linked corporations to, in effect, remove earnings from their corporations, using a sale as a basis to do so. Without this rule, such sales between related parties could be used to convert what should be dividends to an individual shareholder into capital gains that are tax free under the lifetime capital gains exemption.

Bill C-208 proposes narrowing the scope of section 84.1 by removing the sale of shares of small businesses, family farms or fishing corporations from its application, when they are being sold by an individual to another corporation that is owned by their adult child or their grandchild. This change would allow the owner-operator of a family business to convert dividends to the corporation into a tax-free capital gain.

It is important to note that there is currently nothing in the act stopping a parent from selling the shares of a family business directly to their child or grandchild on a tax-free basis using the lifetime capital gains exemption, which currently shelters up to \$1 million in capital gains on qualified farm and fishing properties. The issues sought to be addressed by Bill C-208 arise only in multi-tier corporate structures, where one corporation owns a second corporation. Adopting the proposed changes to section 84.1 could open the door to new tax-avoidance opportunities.

Bill C-208 also proposes amendments to section 55 of the act, which generally applies to corporations that seek to inappropriately reduce capital gains by paying excessive tax-free dividends between corporations, which the act considers to be a capital gain.

● (1750)

Two exemptions to these anti-avoidance rules authorize businesses that are restructuring to allow company shareholders to split company shares between them while deferring taxes. The first exemption applies to the restructuring of related corporations and the second applies to all corporate restructuring.

Bill C-208 would broaden the first exemption so that it applies to brothers and sisters, despite long-standing tax policy that considers brothers and sisters to have separate and independent economic interests for these purposes. Any change to this exemption would risk eroding our tax base.

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Spouses, as well as parents and their children, are already eligible for this exemption, because it is presumed that they have shared economic interests. Although brothers and sisters cannot restructure their participation in a corporation on a tax-deferred basis under the related corporations exemption, they can do it under the second exemption of section 55, which applies to all corporate restructurings.

This is called the butterfly exemption, and there are few tax avoidance opportunities under it. If the proposed amendments under section 55 included in Bill C-208 were passed, siblings could undertake business restructurings in which otherwise taxable capital gains realized between corporations would be converted into tax-free intercorporate dividends, which would create new opportunities for tax avoidance in Canada.

I will conclude by saying that we know many businesses are continuing to face stress and uncertainty due to COVID-19. Our government has stepped up to the plate to make sure that they have the support during these unprecedented times.

We have made unprecedented support available to Canadian businesses, including the Canadian emergency business account, which has provided 758,000 business loans totalling \$30 billion. The Canada emergency wage subsidy has supported the wages of more than 3.5 million employees totalling \$36.7 billion.

Just this week applications were opened for the new Canada emergency rent subsidy, which will provide simple and easy-to-access commercial rent support and an additional lockdown support of 25% for businesses that have temporarily shut down due to mandatory public orders. Combined, this will mean the hard-hit businesses subject to lockdown will receive rent support up to 90%.

Our message to businesses remains the same. We have their back.

There are important considerations to take into account when we are reviewing the merits of Bill C-208. Our government remains committed to working with family businesses, including farming and fishing businesses, to make it efficient, or less difficult, to hand down their businesses to a next generation. However, we must exercise caution when making amendments to the Income Tax Act.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):
Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in the House.

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Before I got into politics, I was the secretary to the Fédération de la relève agricole de l'Abitibi—Témiscamingue. My colleague, the member for Brandon—Souris, might be interested to know that.

The matter of transfers, particularly transfers to family members, is very important in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. I remember participating in a workshop about transfers hosted by the Réseau Agriconseils. A number of people attended because they were concerned about this issue, particularly since land value is different in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. Since our land is worth less than land in other parts of Quebec, it cannot be used as security as often. That is not the subject of this speech, but it is relevant when we are talking about the facility of transfer when a business is being transferred to a family member.

I had the opportunity to talk about this when I participated in the convention of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec, which took place in March in Rouyn-Noranda, located in my riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue. As impossible as it may seem, still today, business owners are better off transferring their business to external shareholders than to a member of their own family.

I want to thank the member for Brandon—Souris for introducing his bill. I would have liked to introduce it myself, much like the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, as it is a fundamental issue. The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-208. For several years now, my party has been calling for measures to encourage and facilitate the transfer of family businesses, especially in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. In fact, I would point out to my colleagues in the House that the member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères introduced Bill C-275, an act to amend the Income Tax Act regarding business transfer in the previous Parliament.

The Bloc Québécois has been calling for measures to encourage and facilitate the transfer of family businesses for more than 15 years. For Quebecers, for the Bloc Québécois, and for me, business succession is important. The next generation is important for the future of our SMEs in general, but especially for the family farming businesses in the Abitibi—Témiscamingue region.

Business succession is a major and promising phenomenon across Canada and especially in Quebec. Nearly one-third of Quebec's small and medium-sized businesses were buyouts. In 2017, one-quarter of Canadian SMEs were takeovers. In Quebec, the majority of business buyouts are in rural areas, where 44% of the SMEs belong to entrepreneurs who have taken over a business. In Canada, that figure is around 31%, according to UQTR professor Marc Duhamel, a regular researcher at the UQTR's small business research institute. Unfortunately, the government's unfavourable tax rules do little to encourage business succession.

The risk of sales to foreign buyers and businesses being lost is very real. In 2018, it was estimated that between 30,000 and 60,000 Quebec businesses would not find a buyer in the years to come and would die as a result. That represents around 150,000 jobs and \$8 billion to \$10 billion in revenue.

Right now, Quebec is losing one farm a day. That is alarming. The risk of sales to foreign buyers and businesses being lost is very real. In Quebec, the next generation of entrepreneurs is suffering

badly. Unfortunately, this Parliament is not doing enough to support business succession.

Why does the Liberal Party not want to put a family member on equal ground with a foreign investor? Here are the facts. Under the existing legislation, the transfer of a business to a family member is treated as a dividend and not as a capital gain, unlike a sale to a third party. As a result, owners are not entitled to the lifetime capital gains exemption if they decide to sell the business to their children. The existing legislation is an affront to common sense.

Why does the Liberal Party of Canada refuse to amend the Income Tax Act? As we just heard, they appear to be worried about condoning tax evasion. That would explain why the Income Tax Act makes no mention of the notions of transferring, shuttering or selling a small business to a family member, for fear of potential abuse or tax fraud. If abuse and tax fraud are actual reasons, I am having trouble understanding why the Liberal Party continues to do nothing about tax havens.

As the member of Parliament for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, I have had the honour, along with members of my team, to speak with many farmers in my region week after week. I want to acknowledge the president of the Fédération de la relève agricole, Meghan Jarry. The federation and all business owners in Quebec see business succession as a key way to stop the outflow of businesses and Quebecers to urban centres and to make it easier for young entrepreneurs to take over the family business.

Business succession is essential for Abitibi—Témiscamingue. It is essential for all of Quebec. The future of the Abitibi—Témiscamingue region is in the hands of the next generation of farmers.

• (1800)

I want to quote a farmer from the region, Simon Leblond, who is also a friend and a member of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec. He was the president of FRAQ when I was the secretary there. He said the following:

I am certainly going to have challenges, starting with the financing and development of my company, of course. There are also other issues unique to my region, including maintaining a large enough pool of producers to maintain services for farms and, more generally, to ensure the vitality of the industry and make it known to those outside the world of agriculture.

The next generation of farmers is essential because it ensures the vitality of agriculture, which in turn ensures the vitality of the towns in our regions. The vitality of our regions ensures the vitality of Quebec, the dynamic use of our land.

I think we need to talk about distress. In Abitibi—Témiscamingue and other parts of Quebec, farmers young and old are struggling. They have to deal with red tape, paperwork, long hours of work, their roles as mothers or fathers, bills, the stress of everyday life, the stress of being in debt, equipment that breaks down and has to be repaired or replaced, short production and crop seasons, poor weather conditions and all of the other pressures they are under.

Farmers are in real distress. Encouraging and facilitating the transfer of family businesses could alleviate some of that distress. I think that is an important reason for members of the House to support Bill C-208.

Now I would like to talk about what things are really like for new farmers. We all know farmers are stubborn and tenacious people. They are probably the most resilient members of our society. Young farmers are constantly looking for ways to access assets and encourage the transfer and start-up of agricultural businesses in Quebec. They face major challenges, including land grabbing and land financialization, income security, vet services for farm animals, crop insurance and agricultural drainage. These are major challenges. Improving access to land and improving quality of life for Quebec's young farmers is one way to ensure a future in agriculture for Quebec's youth.

It is the duty of this Parliament to create conditions conducive to establishing the next generation of farmers in order to attract that next generation and secure the future of small and medium family farms. That cannot happen without easier access to land. Transferring a farm is the best way to get a start in farming because starting a farm from scratch is very hard.

On top of that, land prices, the cost of quotas and production standards are increasing every year. Farm values are increasing. It takes longer and longer and is increasingly difficult to transfer the farm to one's children. Paying back the loans needed to purchase a farm takes so long and the red tape is becoming increasingly cumbersome, making it increasingly difficult for farmers to access land and operate their businesses. Farmers want the process for purchasing a farm to be simplified. Some are calling for a single-desk model to avoid having to speak to too many stakeholders in a transfer process. Everything I have mentioned from the beginning of my speech reflects opinions expressed by the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec, which works to improve the lives of young farmers in Quebec.

Just today, actually, I spoke with Julie Bissonnette, the president of the FRAC, and its executive director, Philippe Pagé. Regarding the transfer of a family farm, the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec is unanimous: It is just wrong that it is more advantageous to sell the family farm to a stranger than to a family member. Julie Bissonnette told me today that she is always asked about this issue no matter where she goes. Young farmers in Quebec and the Abitibi—Témiscamingue region have been calling for legislative changes for several years now.

She also told me that it was a problem on both sides. The transferors also want this to change. The oldest farmers in Abitibi-Témiscamingue want to transfer their farms to family members. This means that local farming will be put on hold. Dozens, if not hundreds of young future farmers and transferors want to be able to make transactions. This is a global issue. This desire to transfer their farm to their children is part of what has been driving older farmers to work as hard as they do and invest so much time in it for 30, 40 or 50 years. It may even span two, three, four or five generations. Farmers work like mad to provide a future to their kids. Selling their farm to a stranger can lead to feelings of failure or profound grief.

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For farmers, it is a big step to hand over the farm to their children out of love and devotion. That is what I have heard from FRAQ members, young and old alike, who feel concerned. Their greatest wish is to be able to hand over their farms to their families.

I will conclude by mentioning that the tax arguments raised when the last point was rejected do not hold up well if we look at the PBO study. In my opinion, if things are not moving right now, it is because there is a flagrant lack of political will on the part of the Government of Canada. This lack of will needs to stop, and that is why the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-208.

• (1805)

I expect the House to unanimously support this bill in order to prevent this outflow of people to urban centres and to foster the entrepreneurial spirit of our young farmers.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the NDP caucus today at second reading of Bill C-208. We will be according our support at second reading to take it to committee. As I already indicated, we will be looking potentially for some clarifications around the bill when it goes to committee.

I need to praise Guy Caron, the former member of Parliament for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, for his good work in advancing this issue. This is not an insignificant issue. It is extremely important for the next generation of people running small businesses across the length and breadth of our country, for family farms to be passed down from one generation to the next and for fishing corporations to be passed down as well to maintain the vital fishing industry on our coasts across the country.

These are important points that Guy Caron brought forward to Parliament which we are now debating to take to committee. These extremely important things must be put into place.

I am a long-time member of the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce and the Burnaby Board of Trade. Because of that long-time involvement in the Board of Trade and Chamber of Commerce, I have worked with small businesses. I also ran a social enterprise myself.

It is extremely important to maintain those family-run businesses across the country. In many communities, family-run businesses are really the backbone of a community's economic development. Ending what is a very perverse aspect of our tax system and facilitating, in a sense, small businesses under \$1 million to be passed from one generation to the next without penalties being incurred makes a big difference for family-owned business.

As well, I come from a farming family. My mother's family ran a farm in Alberta when it originally came from Norway and settled in the Cariboo Hill area of Burnaby. The area now known as Cariboo Park was the family farm.

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Families that have run farms for generations have nothing but my deepest respect. Again, we have to end the perverse penalties that exist right now for families that want to pass their farms from one generation to the next.

I am going to set aside my speech for a moment because I would like to respond to the member for Newmarket—Aurora, who spoke to the bill on behalf of the Liberal government. He basically questioned the impacts on the tax base of putting forward these measures.

The Liberal government has completely collapsed the tax base in the country. I find it incredible, quite frankly, for any Liberal to stand in the House and say that he or she is concerned about the tax base for something that is of far less significance on the scale of the federal budget than it is in the positive impacts small businesses and farms would feel across the country.

The reality is, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer has pointed out, the government has undermined the tax base to the point that we lose over \$25 billion a year to overseas tax havens. In terms of housing, education, health care expanding to pharmacare and dental care, \$25 billion lost each and every year, \$125 billion since the Liberals came to power, is an astronomical amount.

CRA representatives who came before the finance committee indicated that the reason nobody had ever been prosecuted for the Panama papers or the paradise papers, the well-known documentation around the use of overseas tax havens, was because they had never been given the tools by the Liberal government to crack down on these overseas tax havens. For the government to pretend its concern is the tax base, when it has done anything but, as an excuse, a pretext, for opposing the bill is difficult to believe.

● (1810)

In addition, as you well know, Madam Speaker, the NDP has brought forward provisions around the wealth tax and the excess profits tax. The leader of the NDP, the member for Burnaby South, has been very clear in this respect. The federal Liberal government has simply refused to undertake those measures, even though we know Canadian billionaires have added to their wealth, over \$37 billion since the beginning of this pandemic.

The banking sector has received over \$750 billion in liquidity supports and their profits have been astronomical as well. Just in the first two quarters, over \$15 billion in profits have been supported by federal government institutions, ensuring, with as much largesse as possible, that they have everything taken care of during this pandemic.

In previous crises that the country has gone through, for example, the Second World War, there were strict laws against profiteering. There was an effective corporate tax rate to ensure we were all in this together. The government has refused to do the right thing, whether it is cracking down on overseas tax havens, bringing in a wealth tax or proposing an excess profits tax. It has undermined and destroyed our tax base.

What many Canadians are concerned about is the fact that this could well lead to austerity when Canadians are not getting the supports, in so many cases, they need to get through this pandemic.

The last point I would like to make in reply to the member for Newmarket—Aurora is that he seemed to be very proud about the government support for small businesses. If he spoke with small businesses, the member would know that nothing could be further from the truth. The NDP put pressure on the government to bring in the wage subsidy. The NDP was able to achieve that in this minority Parliament.

However, the rent relief program was a massive failure. The member for Courtenay—Alberni, the NDP small business critic, has raised this repeatedly. Now we have a rent relief program that will fix all the problems with the old one, but the federal Liberal government has refused to put into place the retroactivity that would allow small business that did not get any rent relief in the first version, because it was so badly botched, to apply retroactively for rent relief.

The pretensions of why Liberal members would oppose the bill are disingenuous, to say the least, when the Liberal government has done everything to destroy our tax base, while at the same time has not offered the supports for small business, which are so desperately needed.

A number of people have talked very positively about the bill.

Dan Kelly, president of the CFIB, has said, “Many small business owners are telling us that tax rules discourage them from passing on their firm to their children.”

This time Mr. Kelly was speaking about Guy Caron's work, when he said that the “Bill addresses this unfairness and will help small business owners ensure their firm remains locally owned, creating and protecting local jobs.”

Ron Bennett, president of Canadian Federation of Agriculture, has said, “Simply put, if taxation barriers aren't addressed, we will see fewer and fewer family farms in Canada. We support Mr. Caron and his colleague's commitment to addressing these tax burdens that could cause significant administrative burden.”

● (1815)

[*Translation*]

The bill introduced by Guy Caron, the former member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, was supported by many organizations, including the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec, the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick and the Producteurs de lait du Québec, not to mention several other organizations representing supply-managed farms.

This is part of what should be done to preserve family farms while above all continuing to support a stronger supply management system. We will be supporting the bill and hope to discuss it at greater length in committee.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC) Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of Bill C-208, an act to amend the Income Tax Act with regard to the transfer of a small business or family farm or fishing corporation, which was introduced by my colleague, the member for Brandon—Souris.

The amendments made by this bill are necessary to standardize the process for selling family businesses. These amendments would considerably improve the Income Tax Act with respect to the transfer of a small business or family farm to a family member.

In the current state of affairs, the sad reality faced by business owners is that they must pay more taxes if they sell to a family member than if they sell to a third party. The current act puts operators who want to transfer their family business to their son or daughter at an unfair disadvantage. This forces owners to decide whether they want to keep their life's work in the family or sell it to the highest bidder.

If this bill were adopted, it would facilitate many more family business successions. It would also guarantee the retirement savings that business owners worked so hard to earn and enable more local businesses to prosper, which would strengthen the Canadian economy and local economies. We must never lose sight of the fact that SMEs are the cornerstone of our economy.

Everyone in the House knows a factory, a family restaurant, a corner store or a farm in their riding that has been around for generations. These family businesses are well liked and extremely important to the local economy. These small businesses are the backbone of our society. Some of these businesses not only help feed our communities, but they also provide important jobs for the people in our ridings.

The dynamic of keeping a family business in the family is unprecedented. The idea that an owner could be forced to sell their business to a third party simply because of overtaxation is simply shocking. When a third-party purchaser buys a business, many unknowns come into play. Will the new owner cut jobs? Will they move the business to a different region or even a different country? These are the questions the seller must keep in mind, but also their employees and family members.

We know that Beauce is a haven for SMEs. I will provide two real-life examples from my riding.

My first example is Eddy Berthiaume, the owner of Les escaliers de Beauce, located in my hometown of Saint-Elzéar, who was forced to make the difficult decision that I just explained to the House. He owned 50% of this business for many years. He is a good, hard-working man who spent years building his business. When he was ready to retire, he decided to sell his shares in the family business to his children, but unfortunately, he was unfairly forced to pay thousands of dollars in transfer fees. The worst part of this story is that his business partner was able to sell his 50% stake to a third party and pay a pittance in taxes. He paid essentially nothing.

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Some may wonder how this is unfair. There are other examples like this one that show how the government is letting down business owners across the country. We need a government that is prepared to grant exemptions to Canadians and that does not penalize tenacious families like the Berthiaumes.

My second example is Estampro, a business in Saint-Évariste-de-Forsyth owned by the Fortin family, who dealt with the same rules for transferring the business to a family member. The business, which was founded in 1984, is already run by the third generation of Fortins. The family had to work extremely hard to get there, however. The time and money they spent on filling out forms for the transfer certainly could have been used to hire extra machinists or to make more progress on automation. Instead, the family was trapped in all of the red tape required by the existing legislation, and we cannot underestimate the impact this has had on the family. I spoke with them this week, and I know that they are seriously wondering what problems they will encounter if the business is transferred to the next generation.

● (1820)

I am sure many of my colleagues are aware of cases like these. There are many others throughout my riding. If the House does not act now, then wonderful, healthy, viable, proudly Canadian companies will end up in the hands of people other than the families that built them or, even worse, in the hands of foreign countries.

This bill will also help Canadian business owners by advancing women's entrepreneurship. Only 16% of businesses and 29% of family farms are majority female-owned. If the government stopped penalizing owners of small businesses and family farms who sell their businesses to their daughters, it would help foster entrepreneurship among women and increase their participation in the Canadian economy.

It is very unfortunate that our party is obliged to introduce bills like this one when we have a government that claims to always be there for women and small businesses. We need the government to get involved and quickly examine the issues raised by bills like this one.

This bill is not partisan in any way. I think that the amendments to this private member's bill are not only a matter of fairness, as many of my colleagues mentioned, but also a matter of common sense.

I cannot believe that this government has not already introduced amendments to the Income Tax Act in this area.

We need to treat business owners fairly. These tax policies are unfair when the time comes for them to step down from their family business. Leaving a family business can be a positive thing if they know they are leaving it in the hands of someone they love and, more importantly, someone who will love and honour the values and culture of the business, as the owner did for many years.

Government Orders

Business owners should not feel like they have to sell their business to a third party simply because it will cost them less. Business owners must also obey the law. We would not want them to make concessions or act fraudulently in order to save the hard-earned pension or retirement savings they would otherwise lose in taxes. That is why it is important that Bill C-208 pass in the House as quickly as possible.

I heard some of my colleagues say that changes to this bill could lead to more fraud and tax evasion. That is why our party wrote protection mechanisms into the bill. To forestall those potential problems, the bill provides that the family member purchasing the business must keep their shares for at least five years to avoid the penalty. This will thwart attempts to exploit the system.

Right now, and especially during this global pandemic, Canadian businesses need our help, to stay afloat not just while we fight the pandemic together, but also in the future when the time comes to sell and buy their family businesses. Canadians want to remain self-sufficient. They want to support their local businesses. Most of all, they want their local businesses to succeed from one generation to the next.

I hope the Conservative Party can count on all parties to vote for this bill, which is so important to our family businesses. I speak from experience, because I myself was part of the fourth generation of a family business.

• (1825)

[*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.): Madam Speaker, I listened very closely to the comments that were made, and I know I will get two opportunities to respond: this evening, for a few minutes, and the next time this comes up for debate, when I will try to deal with a bit more of the content.

What concerns me is that members from different political entities in the House have tried to give an impression that I do not believe is accurate. We need to recognize that virtually from day one, the government and the Prime Minister have recognized the importance of small businesses, whether they are the family farms in our rural communities or the stores and shops in our urban centres and rural communities. We have seen this amplified over the last number of months in different ways. I encourage my colleagues on all sides of the House to, at the very least, recognize some of the ways we have done that.

This legislation talks about the issue of taxes, a sense of tax fairness and wanting to see family businesses continue on as much as possible through family members, in a fair fashion. On the issue of tax fairness, the government has demonstrated very clearly where our priorities have been, and we have seen significant tax changes take place.

I want to focus, in what little time I have, on an area of concern that members have talked about in the last hour.

Small business is the backbone of our Canadian economy. It even goes beyond our economy, to our society and lifestyle. It has

been such a positive force for decades and will continue to be a driving force into the future. That is why, virtually from day one of the pandemic, we have invested so many resources, whether through the wage subsidy program, the rent assistance program, or working with banks so small businesses would have the leverage to get the loans that are necessary.

I see my time has expired. I look forward to continuing the next time the bill comes up for debate.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

[*English*]

Pursuant to an order made on Thursday, November 19, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Motion No. 2 under government business.

I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

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[*Translation*]

STATUS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE IN MONTREAL

(The House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 2, Mrs. Carol Hughes in the chair.)

The Deputy Chair: I would like to begin this evening's debate by making a short statement on how the proceedings will unfold.

Tonight's debate is being held under Standing Order 53.1. It provides for a take note debate to be held following a motion proposed by a minister following consultation with the House leaders of the other parties.

The motion providing for tonight's debate was adopted by the House on Thursday, November 19, 2020.

[*English*]

Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak.

Pursuant to the order adopted Thursday, November 19, 2020, members may divide their time with another member and the Chair will not receive any dilatory motions, quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent.

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[Translation]

Pursuant to the rules used in a committee of the whole, members are permitted to speak more than once, provided that there is sufficient time.

At the conclusion of tonight's debate, we will rise and the House will adjourn until tomorrow.

[English]

We will now begin tonight's take-note debate.

[Translation]

The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this committee take note of the status of the French language in Montreal.

He said: Madam Chair, I would like to be very clear from the start: French is the common language of Quebecers. It is our official language in Quebec. It is the language of a proud and open people who live and sometimes survive in the middle of a sea of anglophones. It is also the language of a respectful people who defend the rights of linguistic minorities. It is a language that is both beautiful and fragile. It is our language that we share with thousands of francophones from every region in Canada. We must love, cherish, share and protect it.

Today, I will talk about the French language. I will obviously do so as the member of Parliament for Honoré-Mercier, government House leader and Quebec lieutenant, but first and foremost as a Quebecer, father, friend and huge fan of Quebec music and culture. French is not my first language, but to me, it is the most beautiful language in the world. It is the language of Quebec and Quebecers. It is a language of giants. It is the language of extraordinary people like Félix Leclerc, Réjean Ducharme, Michel Tremblay and Gaston Miron. It is also a language that is our own, the language we speak every day, the language in which we love, laugh and cry. It is the language in which we keep in touch with our friends and ask, "Hey, how's it going, big guy? What's up?" It is the language I use every night when I call my daughter. It is the language in which I have fun with my buddies and chat with my colleagues. It is the language in which we tell each other, "Hang on, we can do it, we will soldier on and make it through", a language of survivors.

It is the language in which we tell bedtime stories to our little ones to help them sleep, with varying degrees of success. It is the language in which we comfort them. It is the language in which we speak with our parents and grandparents and tell them we love them. It is also in French that I learned to play songs by Harmonium, Paul Piché and Beau Dommage on the guitar—again, with varying degrees of success, but with a lot of spirit. It is the language in which my father, my mother, my sisters and I were welcomed here and immediately felt accepted.

I remember that when I first came here, I could not understand a word. I spoke only Spanish. When I came here, I learned a single word, "ici", meaning "here." With only three letters, it was not too hard. I ran to one place and said "ici", then ran someplace else and repeated "ici", and so forth. Eventually, it got a bit repetitive. I un-

derstood that I needed to hurry up and learn a few more words if I wanted to make some friends to play hockey with and play outside with. I learned French, and I learned it quickly. I fell head over heels in love with the language. It is a complex language at times, but that complexity gives rise to the subtleties and nuances that make it so beautiful. It is for these reasons, and many more, that we must do everything possible to protect it.

French is declining in Montreal. This concerns me as a Montrealer, as a Quebecer, and I would say as a Canadian as well. It also concerns my colleagues in other parties, I am sure. It is gut-wrenching, because we see it, we feel it and we live it. We have to keep in mind that there is no simple solution. We cannot look for a panacea that will make everything better. No single measure will fix the problem all by itself. There is no magic bullet. I believe that any solution will require a healthy dose of courage, willingness and collaboration. I mention collaboration because, obviously, the Government of Quebec has a central role to play in protecting the French language.

• (1835)

We must work together because we can do a lot here in Ottawa to protect French in Quebec and elsewhere in the country.

The Speech from the Throne states that the federal government must protect minority language communities, be it our English-speaking friends in Quebec or our French-speaking friends outside Quebec, but that it must also protect French in Quebec. For the first time in the past 150 years, the government recognizes its responsibility to protect French in Quebec, even though it is the majority language there. It must be protected because of its minority status in the rest of Canada and North America.

Protecting French can be done in many different ways. One of them is the modernization of the Official Languages Act, and my colleague is working on that every day. She will have an opportunity to tell us about her work a bit later. Modernizing the act will allow us to do a lot. The act is already a powerful tool, but its scope will be expanded.

Then there is culture. By investing in culture, we invest in our language and our identity. We have more books, television programs and music in French. Is there a better way to learn our language than by listening to Michel Rivard, Daniel Bélanger or Cœur de pirate, by watching *Tout le monde en parle*, *District 31* or *Infoman*—I am sure that Jean-René is watching us—or by attending a play at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde or Théâtre Jean-Duceppe?

Culture must be protected, and protecting French is protecting culture. It can be done in traditional media, but today we ought to go much further and extend the protection online because the world has evolved. That is exactly what we are doing with our broadcasting bill. We have to legislate to protect and promote French content online.

Much work also needs to be done internationally, through international institutions, so that French continues to spread its influence in the world.

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We can also provide financial support, for example, by offering loans and subsidies to help our businesses in Quebec through this crisis. By giving them a helping hand, one way or another, we are helping small businesses in Quebec keep good jobs in Quebec. Quite often, these jobs are in French.

I believe everyone here acknowledges that we need to do more. We will do more, but we need to do it together. Individual actions by individual members of Parliament will not change everything. Governments can and must work together. Quebec is doing its share and will continue to do so, as will we, but all of us here must pitch in, as members of Parliament and as individuals. We have a responsibility, as individuals and as a society, to take action and rally together, to express our linguistic pride, to step up, to stand up for and promote the French language.

We can obviously defend and promote our language through big political gestures, for example by creating programs, but small, everyday actions are just as important. I would even say that there is no small gesture, just meaningful gestures in support of our language, such as buying Quebec music and reading works by one of our many authors.

● (1840)

I have been fighting from the moment I entered politics and will continue until I leave; I will not give up. I will always defend our language. There are 35 members from Quebec in the House and many more who will fight together. I am reaching out to my opposition colleagues. Let us work together.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague, the government House leader, for agreeing to our proposal to hold a four-hour take-note debate tonight about the importance of French in Montreal.

I want to thank the member for Honoré-Mercier for the quality of his comments. I have great respect and esteem for him. Everyone who paid attention can see that he is an inspiration to all men and women around the world who would like to live here, in Canada and in Quebec. It is possible for someone who arrived in Canada at the age of 10 or 12 and who did not know any French to eventually end up here, in the House of Commons, seated not at the right hand of the Father, but at the left hand of the Prime Minister of Canada. Let us be modest, at least.

It just so happens that the minister told us earlier today about learning the word “ici”, which is how he started to learn French. However, here in the House of Commons, he is a cabinet minister and the political lieutenant for Quebec. Like all Canadians and Quebecers, he heard the member for Saint-Laurent question the fragility of French in Quebec in a manner that was extremely offensive. Like all Quebecers, the political lieutenant heard his party's top official in Quebec express doubts about the fragility of French. Like all Canadians and Quebecers, he saw two prominent Liberal Party figures back down and apologize. Like all Canadians and Quebecers, he also saw that half an hour after leaving the Standing Committee on Official Languages, voluntarily, she says, the member for Saint-Laurent “liked” a tweet by a person who cast doubt on—

The Deputy Chair: Order.

The member spoke for two minutes. This is not the time for speeches but for questions and comments. I am sorry, but I have to give others the opportunity to speak.

The hon. leader of the government.

● (1845)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for whom I have a great deal of respect. It is because I have so much respect for him that his words touch me so. I thank him for the kind things he said about me and for pointing out that I was able to learn French and to make something of myself.

My colleague asked me what I have seen. I have seen the Prime Minister stand up in the House not far from where I am now standing and say just how important Bill 101 is and how important it is to defend the French language. I have seen my colleague from Ahuntsic-Cartierville working hard every day to modernize the Official Languages Act, which will revolutionize a number of things. I have seen members from every region of Quebec, including my two colleagues from Quebec City, my friend's neighbours, the Minister of Foreign Affairs who is from Shawinigan and my colleagues from other parts of Quebec who, every time they speak, do so as proud francophones and proud Quebecers. There are 35 MPs from Quebec and all over the country that will always defend the French fact.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague, the House leader, for his intervention.

He spoke fervently about our beautiful language with its exquisite words and the accents that recall its past. He contributed his own accent, which was much appreciated.

My question is simple. Will we be hearing from the member for Saint-Laurent this evening, the member the Liberal Party threw under the bus a week ago?

I think her point of view would be tremendously important, especially since she herself is a child of Bill 101. If we want to figure out how we can all get along with each other, in contrast to the ghettoization brought on by multiculturalism, and if we really want to make French the common tongue in Montreal, then listening to young newcomers and reaching out to them would make good sense. Will we be hearing from her this evening?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I would like to tell my colleague that getting along with people also means avoiding deeply personal attacks.

Speaking of personal attacks, the leader of the Bloc Québécois called the Minister of Official Languages an enemy. We could do without such words in the House, at a time when the use of violent and inappropriate words online and elsewhere is on the rise. We can disagree on many things in many different ways. We can have our own points of view, but I would never consider the Bloc Québécois an enemy. Never.

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[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Chair, first I want to thank my friend, the minister, for his very passionate discussion today on French and the importance of the French language, not just in Quebec, but across the country. We, as the government and as a party, are so committed to preserving it.

My family landed in Montreal. Sadly, we did not end up staying there for too long, but could the minister give us some examples of newcomers to Quebec who settled in and now speak the language? The area he represents is very diverse. What does he feel when he sees the many different cultures that have embraced the French language and are flourishing in Montreal?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I am one of those examples. As I mentioned, when I came here I only spoke Spanish. I did not speak a word of French or English. My English is still not very good, but it is still there.

My colleague from Hochelaga came from Chile. There are many examples in this room of people who learned French and English. They are so proud to live their life in this country and represent it as best as they can.

• (1850)

[Translation]

The beauty of our Quebec and Canadian society is that it makes no difference whether you come from somewhere else or were born here. The beauty is that we can all live together in harmony, and we all want to raise our children in peace and democracy, giving them the best possible opportunities, all while respecting both official languages.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Chair, I have something I would like to say to the political lieutenant for Quebec. His party's biggest supporter in Quebec, the member for Saint-Laurent, offered to step down from the committee and liked a tweet that once again questioned the quality, importance and fragility of French in Montreal.

How can he tolerate having someone on his team who would challenge the reality facing Quebecers like that?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I thought the debate would be on the decline of French and the importance of defending and promoting it, not that it would be an opportunity to attack certain individuals. This surprises me a bit, coming from my hon. colleague.

In his very eloquent presentation, my hon. colleague forgot to mention that the Prime Minister has recognized the importance of Bill 101 and defending French. He did not talk about my colleague's hard work on the official languages file or point out that many members stand up here every day to defend French. We are proud of that language.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Chair, I was blown away by the speech by our colleague across the way.

I have a question for him. He said that when he arrived in Quebec he was inspired by great Quebec authors, composers and poets.

What does he think of the platform that is left for Quebec artists who want to express themselves in French in the arts right now?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for that very important question.

Our culture is who we are. It is our identity, our past, our present and our future. Our artists, whether in the field of music, television or film, are going through a difficult and complex time because there has been a major shift from traditional media to digital media. We went from cassettes, records and CDs to listening online. That is why we need to overhaul the Broadcasting Act. That is precisely what my colleague the Minister of Canadian Heritage did to protect French content on all platforms.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Madam Chair, thanks to my colleague, the Conservative member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, this evening we will be debating the importance the French language in Canada.

Before beginning my speech, I want to address all francophones in Canada. I want to tell them that I am proud to live in a country that was born in French. French is not just an official language, it is a national language. It is part of the core identity of our country, our culture and our heritage. It is the flag of the Quebec nation, Acadians and many francophone communities across the country from Restigouche to St. Boniface and from Grande Prairie to Grand-Pré.

Many Canadians have personal stories about the French language. I was born in Quebec but moved to Ontario when I was only 18 months old. Unfortunately, I had not mastered French before turning two years old. I learned French in the Canadian Armed Forces when I was 18. I am proud to be bilingual. It was important as an officer in the air force and it is important to me now as a member of Parliament. Canada's English-speaking and French-speaking politicians have a responsibility to protect the French language in Canada.

Being the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada means being the leader of the party that united our country through an alliance between two founding peoples, a union that was always enriched by the contributions of first nations.

I often speak against the destruction of statues of John A. Macdonald, but I started to speak against the cancel culture three years ago by defending one of the French-speaking Fathers of Confederation, Hector Langevin. Quebec's true blue Tories played a central role in the creation of Canada.

Yes, being the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada means following in the footsteps of Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier, monumental figures in our history who recognized that, together, we can do great things. It means leading the party that fought to include Quebec in our Constitution, with honour and enthusiasm.

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It also means being the leader of the party that fought to recognize the Quebec nation, while the Liberals have done everything in their power over the last 60 years to suppress Quebec nationalism. The truth is that Quebeckers have always been better represented by the Conservative Party, and that still holds true today.

The Internet, Netflix, Instagram, Twitter, iPhones, none of that existed when the Official Languages Act was adopted. It needs to be updated. The Liberals refuse to do it quickly. They prefer to focus on other issues, they prefer discussion to action. However, what the Liberals do not want to discuss is the need for much stronger action in Quebec.

Montreal, the city where I was born, is the second-largest French-speaking city in the world, and it has to remain so. There are seven million francophones in Quebec in an ocean of 779 million people in North America. It is normal for Quebec to have laws in place to protect French. Not only are these laws necessary, they are desirable.

• (1855)

Between 1996 and 2016, the percentage of people whose first language is French dropped from 52% to 46%. For a long time, Liberals refused to protect French in Quebec because they did not want to harm linguistic minorities in Canada.

Some commentators suggested in bad faith that the anglophone minority in Quebec is the equivalent of the francophone minorities in other parts of the country. But that is a false equivalency. There is no comparison at all between the two groups in the North American context, where hundreds of millions of anglophones live. Among the two languages, only French is endangered. For Liberals, a francophone Quebec is not even a reality we have to live with.

For us Conservatives, a francophone Quebec is a source of pride. It is a part of a heritage we must fight for. The Conservative Party proposes to apply Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses in Quebec. We will support the measures the Legault government will take to defend French. Protecting the existence of the only francophone nation in North America is a worthy project. It is a patriotic and Canadian endeavour.

The Conservative Party will take part in the fight to protect and promote French in Quebec and in other parts of the country. We will step up. They can count on me and my colleagues for French to remain the common language of Quebec, the language of work in Quebec and a source of pride for all.

The central place of French in Quebec makes Canada a strong country and a bilingual country. We cannot afford to lose that.

• (1900)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I listened to that with great interest from both here and outside.

I would like to know how the official opposition leader can reconcile what he said with the actions taken when the Conservative Party was in government. I am thinking, for example, of the major cuts to our culture. There were cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada and to official languages. There is also the fact that the Conservative Party refuses to appoint bilingual judges to the Supreme Court.

How can the member reconcile what he is saying right now with the past actions taken by the Conservative Party, which remains part of its legacy?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Chair, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is a bit tired this evening, even before the questions.

In my speech on Bill 101, I said that it was time to modernize federally regulated businesses. That is fair.

When I was a lawyer in the private sector, I worked for Gillette, a big corporation, and I worked closely with the Office québécois de la langue française. It is not fair that banks and big telecommunications companies are not subject to this law. It is time to modernize the Official Languages Act by taking Bill 101 into account.

That is why we are here this evening. We have a strong team and a new leader. It is time to modernize our laws for the good of French in Canada.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Chair, I listened carefully to the leader of the official opposition. I note that we are approaching the holidays.

It makes me think of Christmas. At Christmas, everyone gets dressed up. At least, that is what happens in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. Everyone gets dressed up and puts on their beautiful jewellery. It is a special occasion. The leader of the official opposition showed off his fine jewellery. However, if we examine the Conservatives' past actions with respect to the appointment of judges, nothing happened.

Today, we are being told that the Conservatives would be amenable to applying Bill 101. Why did they never do so? That is my question. When they have an opportunity to do something, they do not do it.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Chair, I thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for his question, and I wish him a merry Christmas.

I have been the leader of the Conservative Party for three months, and I just told the story of my personal experience with the French language. I learned French in the Canadian Armed Forces. It was important when I was an officer in the CAF, and it is important today. I appreciate our history. Canada's history is the history of a country that was founded in French. That is why I will protect it, and I am proud of that as well.

• (1905)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Chair, I really appreciated the speech by the leader of the Conservative Party, especially when he took up the NDP's idea to extend the scope of Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses in Quebec.

I would like him to comment on the key role that Radio-Canada's radio and television programming plays in many francophone minority communities across the country. Why did his party seem unable to make clear commitments in favour of funding for Radio-Canada?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Chair, I thank the NDP member for his question.

He should take a look at my policies because I am proud of Radio-Canada. It is important to have services for francophones in Quebec as well as for minority communities across the country.

I will modernize English-language television because there is a lot of choice in English. That is not the case in French. That is why it is time to provide more services in French and indigenous languages. That is an example of services in the public interest. With respect to private-sector competition in English-language digital television, that makes no sense in 2020 when we have Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon.

That is why it is time to modernize the Official Languages Act, and the government needs to do it before Christmas.

Mr. René Arseneault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Chair, what an interesting and sanctimonious speech.

The opposition leader was right about how Canada started in French. Maybe members need a refresher. It all started when Acadia was established in 1604. I am a proud descendant and representative of the Acadians, as are so many.

I saw what the Conservatives did when they slashed the court challenges program, a destructive move whose impact is still being felt today because people could not fight for their rights. I saw the cuts to Radio-Canada, our only national news source. There are plenty of other examples.

Just like anyone else in Canada, no matter what language they speak, education is certainly the main thing that francophones outside Quebec need. Education is the most important tool we have to build a better future.

Why were you taking so long to say something about Collège Saint-Jean and its importance? Would you please comment on that?

The Deputy Chair: I remind the parliamentary secretary that he has to address his comments to the Chair.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for the question.

He should have listened a bit more closely because I just mentioned the Acadians in Restigouche and Grand-Pré. I lived in Nova Scotia during my time in the air force. They are an important community. Both of our national languages need to be protected in Quebec and from coast to coast.

We are proposing policies to do just that. That is not what the hon. member's colleague, the member for Saint-Laurent, thinks should be done. She refused to acknowledge the decline of French in Montreal. That is unacceptable, and that is why we are here tonight, thanks to the efforts of the Conservative Party.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Chair, I congratulate the leader of the official opposition for his speech. I say “leader of the official opposition”, but what I mean is “future prime minister of Canada.” His speech filled me with pride. Obviously, our political opponents try to demonize the Conservative Party, but I believe we have a strong leader who is demonstrat-

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ing his knowledge of both official languages and the French language in Quebec and throughout Canada. I have a question for him.

What goes through his mind when he hears the government House leader and other Liberals try to lecture us on French when the member for Saint-Laurent cannot even acknowledge that French is in decline? What goes through his mind when he sees the Quebec president of the Liberal Party of Canada denigrate French? What goes through his mind when the member for Mount Royal keeps saying that Bill 101 is not important?

Is it legitimate for Quebec to seek to extend the scope of Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses? What are his thoughts on that?

● (1910)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for the question and for his extraordinary remarks in both official languages.

I am disappointed by the comments that were made by the hon. member for Saint-Laurent and the president of the Liberal Party in Quebec. Liberal Party leaders in Quebec denied that French is in decline in Montreal. That is unacceptable. We must protect French.

As I said in my speech, I am proud of that as an MP, as a veteran, and as a Montrealer. We must modernize the Official Languages Act. The government House leader needs to introduce a bill before Christmas. Also, a generation later, we need to look at Bill 101. It is time for federally regulated businesses to contribute to protecting French as the language of work in Quebec.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Madam Chair, I rise this evening to speak about issues that I think are important.

I will begin by talking a little about Quebec culture. We recently talked about the program *La petite vie*. We are going to talk about it a little more. In one of the most popular episodes, Ti-Mé has a watch that vibrates when he tells a lie. If it were the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, his arm would have fallen off a few minutes ago. Saying that applying the Charter of the French Language to federally regulated businesses was the NDP's idea is just one of the countless foolish things that those members have said.

However, I have good thoughts and good words for the leader of the official opposition. I understand that the official opposition will support this bill. I believe that his affection for the French language is sincere. The leader of the opposition's fluency in French has improved dramatically since he took up his current position.

I respectfully submit to his attention, however, that Quebecers are not asking federalist parties to protect French. They are asking federalist parties to respect Quebec's exclusive jurisdiction and the absolute legitimacy of Quebecers when it comes to protecting their national language. This belongs to Quebecers only.

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If the Official Languages Act is to play a role for all francophones outside Quebec and for our Acadian friends, we will be very happy to be their voice here, in Parliament.

In fact, the Bloc Québécois put forward a bill to apply the Charter of the French Language to federally regulated businesses. The Bloc Québécois also introduced a bill which would mandate a minimal knowledge of French for any person wishing to become a Canadian citizen while living in Quebec. I again count on the support of the Conservatives, given their respect for the French language in Quebec.

Recently, the Liberal Party of Canada swept under the rug, a very thick rug given the amount of dust piling up, the comments of Liberal figures, taken from a whole anthology which was alluded to. The same party, instead of taking its responsibilities regarding French and the official languages, wants to have a white paper. That is an excellent name because its pages will probably be completely white also. It will be an utterly empty document.

Lastly, there is Bill C-10 on broadcasting. The minister bragged about the fact that the industry did not ask for a minimal percentage of French content. What a feat! Welcome to the Liberal Party, where people are thrilled to see there is no obligation regarding French content.

The Liberal Party is a bit stuck. Given the attention that this subject is attracting, the Liberals could very well lose a lot of ground in Quebec by going that route.

Why would the issue of French be dealt with differently this time? After all, this issue has been raised many times. The Quebec National Assembly has frequently spoken out about it. The federal government has attacked French many times. Those attacks have been accumulating.

A few months ago, the Liberal Party, mainly through its NDP butlers, started sending the message that the Bloc Québécois is a bunch of racists. The same thing was being said about the Government of Quebec and, by extension, all Quebecers since they support the Quebec government's policies. Quebecers got fed up and said that they supported the state secularism law and Quebec values on freedom of expression.

Once again, there were attacks and a denigration of the French language condoned by the highest power in this country. Of course the jurisdictions and expertise of this government are highly questionable. We will not get into the issue of vaccines again. We will come back to that another time.

• (1915)

The issue of language has come up again at a time when there is friction. Quebecers are fed up, not just of being told what to do, but even worse, of being told that they do not have the right to be. For a long time, Quebec society has been seen as a bunch of hippies with flowers in their hair and with very left-wing values. Perhaps that is not too far off the mark. A lot of work went into giving Quebecers a bad reputation, even though Quebec is a progressive, welcoming and generous society. At a certain point, people get fed up.

That is the context in which the issue of language has come up again. The argument that this is discrimination against anglo-

phones, a historic minority, comes up again and again. I always say that Quebec would not be what it is today without that valuable contribution. This is a source of some confusion, but the historic anglophone minority in western Quebec, which now extends well beyond Montreal, has rights and privileges. Of all the rights and privileges enjoyed by the anglophone community, the right to integrate immigrants who choose Quebec into the English-speaking community is not one of them. There is no such thing. The national and common language in Quebec, the only official language in Quebec, is French. In exchange for the generous welcome offered by Quebecers, those who choose Quebec, who are most welcome of course, are legitimately expected to have a minimum knowledge of this language. This seems to be a value, a request, a healthy and legitimate expectation.

I would go even further and say that the generous welcome offered to immigrants comes with obligations. When I talk about the integration of immigrants, more often than not, I am talking about economic integration rather than cultural and linguistic integration. Indeed, the main thing these individuals want when they choose Quebec is to rebuild their lives there with a minimum chance of prosperity. This brings us back to language. Language proficiency is the first and most important tool for harmonious economic, social and cultural integration in Quebec.

Quebec would not be doing its job if it did not ensure that all people who live on the inalienable territory of Quebec have at least a minimum knowledge of French. It is our duty, economically as well as linguistically and culturally, and for the survival of the nation and the culture that we represent.

For all these reasons, the issue must indeed come up again. The first tool for many things is a common language, and the common language in Quebec, no matter what some Liberals might say, will not be English. Let us be very clear, that language is French. That is what Quebecers want. Good old-fashioned guilt trips will not work on Quebecers anymore.

I will conclude by saying this: People can go ahead, keep on provoking Quebecers, but they should watch out. Once Quebec stands up, it will not stop.

• (1920)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to tell my Bloc Québécois colleague that Quebec is already standing up.

I will now give him another opportunity to withdraw the words he said when he attacked the Minister of Economic Development, calling her an enemy. I can understand that we may disagree on certain issues and have different points of view, but there are no enemies in this House. My opinions may differ from those of the Bloc Québécois, but I would never see the Bloc or any of its members as enemies. My colleague has an opportunity to withdraw his words.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, the member's invitation is based on lies.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Chair, I would just like to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his comments.

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I do not agree with his conclusion. He spoke about the day when Quebec will stand up. Quebec is already standing up.

We, the 78 members, represent Quebec. No one person in the House can claim to speak on behalf of Quebec. We, the 78 members, the cabinet members, the members of the opposition, the Bloc Québécois members and the NDP member represent Quebec. I wanted to set the record straight.

Now, the leader of the Bloc Québécois in his always inspiring French—and I say this respectfully and not sarcastically, because it is always inspiring for all of us—raised some very important points about our discussion on protecting the French language.

Does he realize that if we really want to change things, we need a responsible government here, in Ottawa, and that it is not always by being in opposition that we can make the federal government take action? We can do so by ensuring that there is a federal political party in Ottawa, in the House of Commons, that is responsive to Quebeckers. That is not the case at present.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, there has never been a federal government that has deserved Quebeckers' trust. That is why we, as the voice of Quebec in this place, must always speak about what is good for Quebec and against what is bad for Quebec. That is the very identity of the Bloc Québécois.

As for the fact that Quebec is standing up, that is a good one-liner, but I would say to my esteemed colleagues that it is because they are looking at the ball and chain attached to Quebec's feet and have not yet seen how high Quebec can rise.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Chair, I have never been compared to Ti-Mé from *La Petite Vie* before, but I will not dignify the Bloc Québécois leader's quips and barbs with a reply.

I will simply remind him that extending Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses has been part of the NDP platform since 2008. Four successive NDP leaders have endorsed that idea.

Does the member not think that improving the status of French in Quebec, beyond applying the Charter of the French Language to federally regulated businesses, also requires positive, constructive measures, like funding and increased flexibility to offer French language courses to newcomers?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, I am quite certain the Government of Quebec has already thought of that.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Chair, first off, congratulations to our leader for what was, as always, a very inspiring speech.

The government House leader and the Leader of the Opposition made some very interesting comments, but, as we always say, they need to walk the talk.

I am astonished at the number of members in the House tonight. Judging from their comments, tonight's subject must be awfully dear to the hearts of our Liberal colleagues. Someone is pointing at the screen. How many Liberal members are on the screen? There are 18 Liberal members who are participating virtually and three or four who are physically present in the House. There are as many Bloc Québécois members here as could be allowed due to the pan-

demie. The Conservatives, however, turned out in great numbers, and we appreciate it.

What does my leader have to say about that?

• (1925)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, we can indeed debate and discuss other political parties' interest in the issue of the French language.

There are some who see it as a temporary political issue to be disposed of as soon as possible, because it is a hot potato. This would be on par with wage subsidies being claimed by political parties, or perhaps vaccines that will be available later in Quebec and Canada than elsewhere. It is one of a long list of topics. We could talk about judicial appointments or the Prime Minister's family. There are lots of topics. There are many more topics under the rug than on it.

Of course, we cannot expect enthusiasm from the members on the other side. This is especially true since a large majority of the Liberal members are not from Quebec, and it is harder to get them to make grandiose declarations of love for Quebec. I imagine that the Leader of the Government is exerting considerable pressure to find a few who will not end up putting their foot in their mouth to be able to do that.

I do know some members, both Liberal and Conservative, whose attachment to the French language is very sincere; I am sure of it. It is just a question of numbers and critical mass. In the Liberal Party, the numbers and critical mass do not allow it to be anything more than a passing fad in that caucus.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I would like to remind the leader of the Bloc Québécois that he has made it a habit, almost a reflex, to confuse the Bloc Québécois with the whole population of Quebec. The Bloc Québécois is only a political party. It is no better or worse than any other party. Its members speak on their own behalf, not on behalf of all Quebeckers.

I would like to know if the leader of the Bloc Québécois is capable of understanding that a member can belong to the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois or the New Democratic Party and still feel a deep affection for Quebec, just as they can love French and defend it. The Bloc Québécois does not have a monopoly on loving Quebec and the French language.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, speaking from a purely mathematical perspective, I am happy to see that the government House leader recognizes that the Prime Minister of Canada does not speak on behalf of Canada, since his government is a minority one.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, I just heard the government House leader say that we are not the only ones who can speak on behalf of Quebeckers. However, his own party is about to vote against our bill, which we tabled after a motion was adopted unanimously by the National Assembly. Here is a quote from that motion:

THAT the National Assembly recall that French is the only official language of Qu bec; ...THAT it affirm that the Charter of the French language must be applied to companies operating under federal jurisdiction....

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That is a unanimous request. I would like to hear my leader talk about the fact that we are apparently not the only ones who can speak on behalf of Quebecers, but that we respect the decisions made in Quebec City.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, there is only one Parliament that can claim to speak on behalf of Quebecers, all Quebecers, and only Quebecers. It is my only national Parliament, the one where my allegiance, as a citizen, lies first and foremost, and that is the Quebec National Assembly. There is a kind of log where all the unanimous votes passed by the Quebec National Assembly are recorded. In general, in fact in virtually all cases, it says the opposite of what the Liberal Party of Canada says.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Chair, I have a quick question for the leader of the Bloc Québécois. He spoke earlier about the ball and chain. He just brought up fond memories of the time when we sat together in the National Assembly. For him, it is the only place where Quebecers can meet.

If he loves it so much, why is he not the leader of the Parti Québécois?

• (1930)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, I am quite happy here, because on a winning team, there are offensive players and defensive players. We are pretty good at defence when it comes to keeping Quebec's rights, privileges and interests from being constantly shoved around by the federalist "goons", if my former colleagues will pardon the expression, because of their numbers.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Chair, I am very pleased to rise to speak this evening.

I would like to start along the same lines as the Leader of the Government and the leader of the official opposition and point out that there are 78 members of Parliament from Quebec, and each one of these members is as legitimate as the others. The NDP represents 454,000 Quebecers, which is not insignificant and must be respected in our discussions in the House.

No one has a monopoly over Quebec or over defending the interests of Quebec or the French language. I think this is something we all care about.

I am so proud to participate virtually in this evening's debate because the French language is something I hold very dear. I was fortunate to grow up and live in a home filled with French books, songs, movies and music. The songs of Félix Leclerc and Gilles Vigneault filled my childhood and teenage years. I was immersed in the music of Pauline Julien, Gérald Godin, Claude Gauthier, Robert Charlebois and Diane Dufresne. I could not get enough of Quebec comedians like Yvon Deschamps, Les Cyniques and Sol, and of French comedians Pierre Desproges and Raymond Devos. They were all so unbelievably talented at eloquently using the language, making us laugh and also making us think, all of which made me want to understand and learn more about the beautiful French language.

That is why debates like the one we are having tonight are so important, because this is not simply about a bill or a motion. For many Quebecers, as well as Acadians and francophones outside

Quebec, I am sure, it is a vital and fundamental issue that goes to the core of who we are collectively and individually. Quebec's language and culture are inextricably intertwined. I think this debate is extremely important and needs to take place.

I heard a lot of partisan attacks in the previous interventions. I am not saying I will shy away from those completely, but I will try to refocus the debate on verifiable, objective facts that will help us assess the situation, and on constructive suggestions for improving the defence and promotion of French.

Last week, I was proud to be the member moving a motion calling for the French language to be defended and promoted in Quebec and across Canada. That motion was passed unanimously by the House.

Let me point out that, according to 2018 stats, 94.5% of people in Quebec are able to have a conversation in French. We can agree that it is not necessarily a very sophisticated or complex conversation, but it shows that all the hard work of past years is bearing fruit. Michel C. Auger mentioned that percentage when he was on *Tout le monde en parle* two years ago.

There are four indicators for the French language: mother tongue, language spoken at home, language used in public, and language of work. Personally, I do not feel they are all equal because I think language of work and language used in public are the most important indicators.

There has been a slight decline in the use of French at home. From 1996 to 2016, 82% of households spoke French regularly, but not exclusively, at home. That percentage dropped to 79% in 2016, a slight decline of 3%.

• (1935)

The numbers for spoken language at home by immigrants, by newcomers, are interesting. Before 1981, only 30% of them adopted French, nearly 33% opted for English and 37% used a language other than French or English. Between 2011 and 2016, more than 41% of newcomers adopted French, 49% chose a language other than French or English and only 9% chose English. In 30 years, we have seen an increase in the use of French at home by newcomers. A 2011 report by the Office québécois de la langue française found that a growing number of immigrants chose French over English as the language of use at home.

The real problem, and this is why it is important to have this discussion, is the language of work. According to a 2019 report by the Office québécois de la langue française, French is in decline in retail businesses. People are more often welcomed in English or in a bilingual manner than before. The same report also noted that once the desire to be served in French was expressed, the person received the service in French in Montreal more than 85% of the time.

There is a problem of perception and hospitality, but it is no catastrophe. We must be vigilant and we need to do more, but we also need to make decisions based on objective facts and the reality on the ground. Efforts do need to be made to help businesses, especially those with 25 to 50 employees, report more to the Quebec government on the linguistic quality of the services offered by their employees.

I want to commend the work being done in this area by the Quebec labour movement, especially the FTQ and the CSN, which work mainly in the private sector. They have good programs and work a great deal on French integration.

French integration is key. Bill 101 must apply to companies under federal jurisdiction. That has been part of our platform since the days of Jack Layton. It was taken up by Nycole Turmel and Thomas Mulcair, as well as our current leader, the member for Burnaby South. It is also a question of equal rights for workers. They must have access to documents in French in the workplace.

The matter of French integration is a major issue. I think that considerable efforts must be made to improve access to French language courses by making them free for newcomers. Right now, they face obstacles, such as the requirement to get a study permit. These obstacles may have been put there by the Government of Quebec or to the Government of Canada.

Some members of my staff teach French to newcomers. They tell me that people who do not yet have permanent status have a hard time accessing French classes. This is a major problem.

When the leader of the NDP and I met with the Premier of Quebec before the last federal election, we made it clear that there must be sufficient federal resources to help Quebec teach newcomers French.

There are other things that can and must be done as well. I think that has already been said tonight.

The bill to renew the Broadcasting Act was tabled recently. It is vital to establish very clear goals, principles, approaches and directives for the CRTC, but also for the Canada Media Fund and the Canadian Television Fund, in order to have the necessary resources to create original French-language content, as opposed to translated content. We must secure the means to do it, whether through CRTC regulations, general policy or directives to the CRTC.

In my view, the Bloc Québécois bill requiring French tests for refugees and family reunification applicants is inappropriate and would be hard to implement in reality. It is kind of a bogus solution, not a real solution to a real problem. That is why we in the NDP are quite critical of the idea at this time.

I see that my time is up, and I will allow my colleagues to ask me questions.

● (1940)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech.

I think he is sincere in his love of the French language. He mentioned his former leader, Thomas Mulcair, who, incidentally, called out the member this week over a position he recently took. Our es-

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teemed colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie felt that the Bloc's proposal to make an adequate knowledge of French a condition for becoming a citizen in Quebec was divisive.

Who is right here, Mr. Mulcair or the member?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I am right.

I do want to expand a bit on my answer. I remind the member that there are three types of immigration: economic immigration, which is managed exclusively by Quebec and which awards significantly more points for knowledge of French; family reunification; and refugees.

I find it hard to justify the idea of forcing a French test on people applying for family reunification or on refugees who are fleeing poverty, war or exploitation. In addition, the argument for requiring French tests does not account for movement between provinces. If someone becomes a citizen in Ontario, Nova Scotia or British Columbia and then moves to Montreal, any theoretical benefit of this bill is lost.

In our opinion, this is not fair to refugees, and it would be hard to enforce when someone moves between provinces.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. As I said, he is one of the members who speak for Quebec, like the other 77 members from Quebec. We all speak for Quebec. It is not the exclusive property of a single party.

The member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie lives in the heart of Montreal. The second part of the name of his riding means a small homeland, which is a very apt description. People there have *joie de vivre*, and it is as Québécois as it gets. Can the member tell us what the reality of French is in his riding? We know that the West Island is only a few kilometres away, and the east end of Montreal is similarly close in the opposite direction.

What is the status of French, and how is it under threat in his riding?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for the question.

I agree with him. Voting against a Bloc Québécois motion does not mean that we are against Quebec and Quebecers. Quebec does not belong to a single political party. I completely agree with my colleague's comment.

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French is actually at risk in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie in terms of its day-to-day use and as a language of business, but we also have to recognize that Montreal's English-speaking community is the most bilingual in all of Canada. Its members are able to communicate in French fairly easily. More and more French-speaking Quebecers speak English, and more and more English-speaking Quebecers and Montrealers speak French as well.

This allows for a very respectful relationship, but we still need to be very careful, especially in the retail sector.

• (1945)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be able to express my opinion on this very important subject.

Members know that I am not francophone, but I am a proud francophile. When I was young and living in an anglophone city, I decided to learn French. That was a gift that stayed with me for the rest of my life. My dream, in a country with two official languages, is to promote both of those languages.

I understand the need to always be vigilant in protecting and promoting French in Quebec.

Does my hon. colleague believe that, in order to promote French, the beautiful language of Molière, we need to put an effort into teaching it to the many people who come to Canada from other countries?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader of the NDP and member for Burnaby South for his question.

I find that extremely fascinating. It is a wonderful story. Now Quebecers know that, in his teenage years, as part of his personal and family life, he chose to learn French out of curiosity and a love of that language. I think that will resonate with many Quebecers. I also think that he was absolutely right in saying that we need to invest the necessary resources in teaching French to newcomers. The NDP prefers to take a constructive, positive approach that helps people to learn the beautiful language of Molière and integrate into society. We do not want a restrictive or punitive approach, particularly if it is less effective and harder to enforce. That is why, in my opinion, the New Democrats committed to not only apply Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses but also to allocate additional resources to French education.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague quoted Yvon Deschamps during his short presentation. Yvon Deschamps was a master of irony, which is a convenient little device that allows us to say the opposite of what we really mean. People use irony often. I think it is funny coming from my colleague for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, especially when he tries to claim the NDP was behind the legislation to apply Bill 101 to federal jobs. Sadly for him, that is not so. It was the MP Pauline Picard who introduced the bill for the first time in 2007. As is often the case when Quebecers are interested in something, the Bloc Québécois made the first move and introduced a bill like that one. The NDP picked the idea up afterward.

The irony does not stop there. The NDP's strong presence here today illustrates how important its members think French is. The seats are all full. What a strong contingent. I would like my col-

league to set the record straight, at least. When he spoke to the leader earlier, he said it was an NDP idea. If he has any decency, he will set the record straight.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Jonquière for the question.

All I said was that applying the Charter of the French Language to federally regulated businesses has been part of the NDP platform for at least 12 years. It is not only a good way to defend and promote French, but it is also a concept that affects equal rights for workers. We want employees at Caisse Desjardins and employees at Royal Bank to have access to the same rights, the same services in French and the same job contracts in French. We are so in favour of workers' rights that unlike the Bloc Québécois, we have never voted in favour of closure to impose back-to-work legislation in order to prevent striking workers from exercising their right to strike. That is what the Bloc Québécois did in 2009.

• (1950)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his intervention, which was very interesting and very relevant.

He talked about the importance of culture. I would like him to sum up in 30 seconds how he sees the vital connection that exists between language and culture.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of Canadian Heritage for the question.

I think that in the heart and soul of Quebecers, the concepts of culture and language go hand in hand. That has been the case for decades, and I do not see that changing anytime soon. I invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage to be open to possible amendments to his Bill C-10, to further clarify the fact that we need original French-language content made in French in Quebec and Canada. I think that for the next 20 or 30 years, that would be crucial.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I would like to raise something that has happened a few times now. Through you, I would like to remind Bloc members that we must not refer to the presence or absence of people in the House, especially knowing that many NDP members are participating in this event virtually. It ends up trivializing what is an important debate. If you could remind the Bloc members about that, I would much appreciate it.

The Speaker: I would remind all members that they must not point out the presence or absence of other members in the House. That rule applies to all members in the House.

The hon. member for Jonquière on a point of order.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I just said that there was a strong NDP presence here today. I wanted to point that out.

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The Speaker: That warning is for everyone. I am not singling anyone out. I know that people can get excited and forget the rules.

Resuming debate. The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know you to be an admirable colleague and an ally of official languages and francophones, especially in Ontario. I am pleased to make a few comments to you today on the topic of official languages.

It is a privilege for me to speak this evening to a topic that combines my two great loves: the French language and the City of Montreal, my language and my city. Both need our attention and some serious help.

Montreal has been hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis, which has emptied all the high-rises downtown and brought many of our businesses to the brink. Montreal, which had excellent momentum before the pandemic, is now a shadow of its former self, according to some observers. However, I know that with love and attention it will rebound.

Then there is the status of the French language in our Quebec metropolis, which everyone is talking about lately, and rightly so. The issue of the French language in Quebec and in Montreal is fundamental, and we have to do everything we can to protect it.

I come from the Joly branch of the family with roots in Saint-Canut and the Racine branch from Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines. I can trace 13 generations of francophones in Quebec. I still tease my mom when she sometimes tries to use her English. As a teacher, my mother, Laurette, did everything she could to pass on to us, her three children, her love of French.

We had big families where I come from. We would get together regularly, and during the holidays, we would always watch *Bye Bye* on French CBC. About 40 of us would crowd around the television. Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations were always fun. All my life and to this day, I laugh, I cry and I love in French. I learn and I work in French. I live every day in French with Félix, whose grandmother, Gabrielle, fled Germany during the Second World War.

As Quebeckers and Canadians, we must constantly remind ourselves that we are francophones in America, having come from around the globe, a linguistic minority in an immense space, and we are therefore in a situation of survival. We must always do more and go a little further than what is expected of us.

Our government recognizes that and offered a historic recognition in the Speech from the Throne last September. We recognize that we have a responsibility to protect and promote French, not only outside Quebec, but also within its borders.

It is with that objective in mind that we will modernize and strengthen our Official Languages Act, and we will do it properly because it is too important for our country and our identity. This means that we must have the courage of our ambitions, ask tough questions and draw the necessary conclusions, such as the decline of the French language.

It also means that all of us here are duty bound to work together, not against each other, to strengthen our French language in Quebec and in Canada. Language-related anxiety is very real among Canadians and we have to take appropriate measures.

I am extremely concerned by the data that shows a decline in the use of French in Montreal. Obviously, people should have access to services in French in their day-to-day lives. As a francophone, I want to be able to go to a coffee shop and be served in French. I want to make sure that my children will grow up and get a good education in French in my own city.

Passing on one's language is integral to our identity, our roots. Every parent would say how important it is. It is visceral. It is an issue that touches us deeply at the very core of our being and, as a Montrealer, proud member of Parliament for Ahuntsic-Cartierville and Minister of Official Languages, I want to tell people that I hear them and I understand them.

We will work together to ensure that Montreal remains Quebec's crown jewel of the French language for the generations to come. All levels of government need to participate, and we must all work together.

Let us be clear: The common language in Quebec is French. Any work to strengthen one person's rights must not come at the expense of another's.

• (1955)

The city of Montreal is woven together by diverse cultures and steeped in the history of the francophone and anglophone communities that have been coexisting, intermingling and working together to build a future for generations. Has it always been that simple? No, it has not, but this intricacy, this mosaic, makes the city stronger and fuels creativity. French has flourished for years and continues to do so, thanks to the existing laws and strong institutions.

Today, the conclusion is rather simple. We must do more. Times have changed, and society has as well. I urge those elected officials who are tempted to turn official languages into a political issue to take a step back. We can all work together to strengthen the French language in Montreal and ensure that everyone's rights, including those of the anglophone minority, are respected.

I hope we can rise above partisanship in this debate, above the notion of "Montreal versus everyone else", above the divisions that are so easy to create. When Montreal is doing well, all of Quebec does well and breathes a little easier, and so does the entire country.

As we deal with the COVID-19 crisis, which is, let's face it, already extremely stressful, now is not the time to exacerbate tensions. Rather, we need to defuse them. This is the time to be conciliatory. We owe it to our fellow citizens. I know that I have valued allies among my francophone and anglophone colleagues. Regardless of our origins, this is a subject that motivates us and brings us together. Our language is beautiful; we must take care of it and we must be proud of it.

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Let us work together as members in this House, with all governments and citizens, so that Montreal, a francophone city, a city of students, a Quebec metropolis, remains the crown jewel of La Francophonie in the Americas and keeps inspiring the entire world. We all have a responsibility to do so.

• (2000)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated the comments from the minister responsible for official languages in Canada, comments that were even lyrical at times, for example when she talked about the flagship of the Francophonie in the Americas. My goodness, that is inspiring and I congratulate her.

Now, the reality is that the Liberal government has been in power for five years. The Official Languages Act was passed 51 years ago. It was updated under the Conservative government in 1988. The Liberals said they were going to update it and go through it with a fine-toothed comb to modernize it five years ago. Five years later, we find out we might get a white paper.

Does the minister realize that a white paper is just passing the buck? The government committed to modernizing the Official Languages Act. Modernizing the Official Languages Act means modernizing the act, not tabling a white paper.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his compliments. I am happy to talk about my love of the language and even about other very well-known Montreal poets, if he likes, since we are speaking of flagships and golden ships.

All this to say that I understand that we need to take action. Our government has recognized the importance of taking action. We have done so for the past five years, by bringing out a historic plan for official languages, saving CBC/Radio-Canada, doubling the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts, and providing funding for the French-language military college in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, which had stopped granting university degrees and educating our soldiers in French. We also restored French-language services and were able to reinstate the court challenges program.

We did so much that, while we were doing all that work, we said that we absolutely had to go back to the beginning, to the legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who introduced new official languages legislation in 1969, after the Laurendeau-Dunton commission.

Today, society has changed and reform is necessary. That is why we are moving ahead with this reform.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, when we talk about Pierre Elliott Trudeau's legacy, we need to be careful.

He was very contemptuous of Bill 101 and said that it was pushing us backwards. Then he brought in the Official Languages Act at a time when francophones were suffering significant economic discrimination and when French was very much in retreat. When it comes to official languages programs, all the money goes exclusively to supporting English.

Second, the principle behind the Official Languages Act runs counter to Bill 101, which is based on a model focused more on collective and territorial rights, meaning that, in a given territory,

there needs to be a common language in order to integrate newcomers. In contrast, the Official Languages Act model promotes institutional bilingualism and sends newcomers the message that they can adopt the language of their choice.

Quebec is still part of Canada, unfortunately, and we are part of that minority that was recognized for the first time in the Speech from the Throne. Given this reality, there is a natural tendency for newcomers to choose English. The problem is that newcomers are not being integrated enough. It is the very foundation of the Official Languages Act that runs counter to Bill 101.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for pointing out that this is the first time in 43 Parliaments that a federal government has recognized that French is a minority language.

However, one very important fact must be made clear, namely that the Government of Canada is the Government of Quebec's main partner in French integration for immigrants. It is a mistake to say that the Government of Canada only supports English in Quebec. In reality, under the Canada-Quebec accord on immigration, the Government of Canada transfers a large amount of money to the Government of Quebec, which then uses it to teach newcomers French. That makes us a partner and an ally.

It goes without saying that immigrants in Quebec must have opportunities to speak the language. That is why we have this agreement, which has been in place since 1988. That is also why I have had several discussions on these issues with Quebec's immigration minister and the minister responsible for the French language. We must always do more, and it is a challenge to integrate immigrants in French not only in Quebec, but also in the rest of the country.

We know that the issue of francophone immigration is important, as is the demographic weight of francophones. This is why, as minister, I had the opportunity to announce for the first time a francophone minority immigration strategy. One million francophones outside Quebec fight every day to speak French. It is a choice to speak French when you are in a minority.

Our government must therefore be there to support strong institutions, so that these people are able to speak their language, in Ontario or elsewhere, and so that an entire community can maintain its wonderful vitality. The arrival of newcomers who join these minority communities will help achieve this goal. This is why francophone minority immigration is important.

I simply wanted to correct my colleague with kindness and much respect. This was just one example. I could give him another one, involving support for arts and culture and for broadcasting. No one here thinks that Radio-Canada is not important to Quebec. It is one of the largest federal institutions, and we reinvested \$675 million in it.

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• (2005)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I clearly stated that the official languages program was aimed entirely at the anglophone side. The hon. member said I was mistaken, but she responded by talking about the arts and all kinds of things other than official languages.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has just made my point. The Official Languages Act is one thing. The government's language policy is another. In Canada, institutional bilingualism does in fact come from the Official Languages Act, but also from a whole series of measures, decisions and agreements.

The Speaker: I will have to stop the minister there.

I see that a lot of members want to ask questions. I would therefore like to remind members to keep their questions, as well as their responses, fairly short, out of respect for those who wish to speak, so that everyone gets a chance.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am 5,000 kilometres from Montreal tonight, addressing the House from the city of New Westminster, a few blocks from the first school in a vast francophone educational network that extends all over British Columbia.

I appreciated the speech by my colleague, and I have two questions for her, to which we would like clear answers.

First, does she agree that Bill 101 should apply to federally regulated businesses in Quebec? I ask this because these businesses still do not guarantee their employees the right to work in French.

Second, does she agree that the Official Languages Act must be strengthened to give people the right to receive services in French across Canada, including in British Columbia?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleague that it is always inspiring to hear him speak French, since he speaks it so very well. I have a lot of respect for him, and I am pleased to be able to count him as an ally.

I heard his first question on Bill 101. I am already in contact with my provincial counterpart, Simon Jolin-Barrette, the minister responsible for this file. He is working on his own reform, and we are waiting for more information. I am naturally looking forward to his response, but we are continuing to work together.

As for my colleague's second question about strengthening the Official Languages Act, the objective is, of course, for anyone to have access to high-quality services in French in British Columbia, for example. That is exactly the objective of strengthening the act. I would be happy to share more information with him in the coming weeks.

• (2010)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to participate in this debate, especially this week because the eldest of my five children, Amélie, just gave birth to my fifth grandchild, my second grandson, my little Arthur. There is bound to be a tear in my eye, proof that people soften with age.

I came here in 2006 as a unilingual francophone parliamentarian. I was born in a little village called Saint-Narcisse-de-Beaurivage. I

am proud of my roots, my language, and the unique aspects of my francophone culture.

I want to say how touching it is to hear our children and grandchildren say their first French words and write their name so proudly for the first time. Moments like those and many more are priceless as we watch our little ones go to school and learn to speak and write French. Being born into a French-speaking environment and being able to live in French is a precious inheritance and the basis of a culture that makes us unique, expressive and undeniably warm-hearted thanks to our rich vocabulary and the variety of words with which we can express our feelings and emotions so incredibly precisely.

I am also very thankful to my late mother, Rita Boissonneault, who shared her love and knowledge with me throughout my childhood. The term “mother tongue” is very apt, as our first language generally comes from our mother or whoever acts in that role for us. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the exceptional work that mothers do for their children and, in turn, for our francophone community.

I want to tell members what is really on my mind. I believe that Quebecers and Canadians did not realize all of the risks involved in electing this Liberal government that was full of promises but that has led us down so many dead-end roads. We are learning the hard way. The protection of French and official languages is no exception. Today, we are afraid and, unfortunately, the Liberals know that people do not realize how bad a situation has become until that delicate balance is jeopardized or, worse, put to the test. Sometimes it is because we are naive or because we are dealing with many different concerns that we do not realize that we are on the brink of disaster and how important it is to protect our roots.

Right now, one inevitable fact remains: we must take action. As a person who only speaks French, it was a privilege for me to be a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages when our country was skilfully led by a Conservative government, with a Prime Minister worthy of that title who was always committed to beginning his speeches in French.

It was not out of opportunism, unlike what our colleagues from the Bloc are doing. They are having fun right now trying to make us believe they have good intentions. I would remind the House that our government was the first to recognize the Quebec nation within a united Canada. I am still proud of that today.

To find someone responsible for the decline of French would of course be pointless. What we need are strategies and an action plan combining all our efforts to implement the new Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages and to get results. Clearly, the government is doing nothing to fix this situation. It is just making lots of errors of judgment and action, preventing it from taking the correct path to protect French.

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This brings WE Charity to mind. Not only was it a corruption scandal involving an untendered contract, but it was awarded to a unilingual anglophone organization, thus excluding francophone companies. I am also thinking of the text messages sent in English only for the COVID Alert app. Finally, I am thinking of unilingual English labelling of products to fight the pandemic, to name just a few. The Liberals have yet to come up with a timeline for modernizing the Official Languages Act.

On August 26, the Government of Quebec and the minister responsible for the French language, Simon Jolin-Barrette, announced their plans to take action to strengthen the position of French in Quebec, stating that they wanted Bill 101 to apply to federally regulated businesses operating in Quebec, such as banks and VIA Rail. It is perfectly legitimate for the Quebec government to want to protect its language and culture.

In addition, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Th  berge, released his annual report on September 29. It contains three recommendations, including a recommendation to modernize the Official Languages Act and a recommendation to go beyond the action plan for official languages 2018-23.

• (2015)

He recommended that we invest in our future, in the promotion of the country's linguistic duality.

Finally, the commissioner also stated that the obvious lack of bilingual services puts public safety at risk. He believes that the failures with respect to the official languages since the beginning of the health crisis put public safety at risk, and so do I.

I would like to briefly state what the Conservatives would do and require.

The Conservative Party believes that it is vital that we modernize the Official Languages Act.

The Conservative Party recognized the Quebec nation and is a strong supporter of the French language in all francophone communities outside Quebec.

On September 14, our leader met with Fran  ois Legault and confirmed that he agreed with Quebec's demand that Bill 101 apply to federally regulated businesses operating in the province. The Conservative Party supports the application of Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses in Quebec. It goes without saying that this is about respect.

The Conservative Party wants to expand the mandate of the Official Languages Commissioner to include a review of services in French for all francophones across the country. In the last election campaign, the Conservatives promised to require all federal departments to have plans and objectives to improve their services in both languages, and we would also have liked to expand this approach to federally regulated businesses.

A Conservative government led by our leader will modernize the Official Languages Act to adapt it to today's reality without delay. The Conservative Party is calling on the Minister of Canadian Heritage to provide reasons for the delay. The Conservative Party is urging the Prime Minister and the Minister of Canadian Heritage to

provide a timeline for the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Many of us here in the House can legitimately speak to the importance of defending and preserving French both in Quebec and outside Quebec, as a mother tongue and language of work, but very few of us are truly able to do it.

The Liberals have proven to be utterly disappointing, and the Bloc, for its part, can talk all it wants, but we all know it will never be able to do anything since it can never form a government here in Parliament.

History has always proven that the francophones in our country and especially in Quebec have a very great sense of leadership for preserving their language and francophone values. The example of the debate this evening is living proof of that leadership and reminds us that these moments of awareness encourage many Quebecers to take all the necessary steps to ensure the preservation of our very beautiful French language.

In my opinion, solutions will come from all of us in the larger French-speaking community. It will come from stakeholders who put their heart and soul into defending what is vital for us. Our perseverance in our struggles has always made the difference, as well as the great francophone solidarity, which I consider to be a unique phenomenon, when we face the common challenge to safeguard our French language.

Little individual actions can add up to create an unprecedented collective effort, and the story of our presence here, in America, is a living proof of that principle. We can support our French communities in several ways, and the overhaul of the Official Languages Act becomes important and unavoidable in the debate we are having tonight. Not to mention that granting Quebec's request for greater autonomy in areas of culture and immigration could, in the long run, help protect French in Quebec and by extension in the rest of Canada.

Therefore I humbly submit my thoughts and I hope, as a father and grandfather, that my heartfelt appeal will be heard: We must unite and rally behind the only party capable of protecting our French language, which is so dear to us, and ensuring its sustainability. We must elect a new Conservative government at the next general election.

The love and deep affection felt by all francophones for their language unite them behind a common goal which goes beyond the personal interests of each person. What makes a huge difference as far as results are concerned is the sum of all our actions.

To the entire francophone community which I represent with pride and dignity, I say that we have to face adversity, stand together, be prolific in our initiatives and remain faithful to our origins. Each era has its challenge, and the election coming up in the next months will be vital for what happens next.

• (2020)

To conclude, I will say that it is all about making choices, and people can take my word for it that I will make all possible efforts to ensure the prosperity and the influence of my mother tongue for the good of all of us in Parliament and in all my daily activities.

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Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. Congratulations to Amélie and Arthur.

The member said that he sat on the Standing Committee on Official Languages during the time of the Harper government. I would like to know how he reacted then to the drastic cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada's budget, to the abolition of the court challenges program and to the fact that his government only appointed unilingual anglophone judges to the Supreme Court.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I think Amélie will be very happy to hear the minister's congratulations.

I remind my colleague that the worst budget cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada happened under the Liberals. More than a third of the cuts, in fact. We will take no lessons from the Liberals in that regard. There was an economic crisis and everyone had to do their part. We need to set the record straight.

If the member wants to bring up judicial appointments, I will gladly indulge her since it is one of my favourite subjects. As it turns out, the Liberals' only criterion to appoint judges is whether they greased Liberal palms or sent a little cheque to the party. If so, the doors are wide open. I will not belabour that point because it is straying away from tonight's debate, which is very serious.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker a few times this evening members have been questioning the existence of the Bloc Québécois, saying that it will never be able to form government and is of little use. I find that scandalous. That is a little nod to my colleague who just spoke.

The Bloc Québécois is here to defend the interests of Quebec and to speak on behalf of the Quebec National Assembly when it adopts unanimous motions. The two main parties have not historically been reliable in this respect.

Back to the topic at hand, if the Bloc Québécois did not have 32 members of Parliament right now, I am not sure that we would be debating the French language this evening. That is why we are here.

We have heard a lot of emotional speeches this evening, and while I find that good, the Liberals need to remember that they are in government. They need to take meaningful action. The Liberal government talks a good game. Does my colleague not think that is scandalous?

We are proposing two concrete actions: allow Quebec to welcome new citizens in French and allow Quebecers to work in their language in all businesses.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on welcoming new residents in French.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I will speak to all Quebecers.

In my speech, I listed the necessary steps we need to take to protect the French language and move forward. There is only one way to do that. In a few months, the Conservative Party is going to end up on the other side of the House with the help of 32 to 40 ridings in Quebec, no doubt, and those ridings will all be well represented.

They will not be represented by 40 silent members like the Liberals. They will be represented by a whole team of francophone Conservatives from Quebec.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating my colleague on the birth of his grandson. In 2020, little snatches of light and life like this are good for the soul. We will take them.

With regard to his speech, I can tell that he is sincere about the French language. I have no doubt about that. I thank him for his speech.

However, here is my question for him. When he was a member of Stephen Harper's government, Mr. Harper was not shy about appointing unilingual anglophones to all sorts of key positions. Take, for example, Michael Ferguson's appointment as Auditor General or the judges who were appointed to the Supreme Court. The Conservative government at the time said that the positions had been posted but that no qualified bilingual candidates had applied and so it had no choice.

Does the member not agree that, in order to be appointed to the highest court in the country, candidates must be bilingual and able to hear cases in both French and English? In his opinion should that not be a prerequisite for being appointed to the Supreme Court?

• (2025)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the member wants to move forward with a more francophone future in Canada.

However, if we really want to stop the decline of our language, us francophones all have to do our part, because it is us francophones who will stand up for French. We cannot expect help to come from Canada, the United States or anywhere else in America.

We have to ensure our own protection, and we in the Conservative Party will do so as the future government, with our future prime minister who was here in the front row earlier. At least, he bothered to show up and give a speech.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

In every province where the NDP has been in power—British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario—francophone rights have improved, but every time it was against strenuous opposition from the Conservatives.

I wholeheartedly hope for a change in direction, but does the member understand that the Conservative Party's approach in the past has often been to suppress the rights of francophones? Is he saying that his party will be more favourable to linguistic equality and respect for both official languages in this country moving forward?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

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It is a pleasure for me to talk about the future of the Conservative Party, where there will be more and more francophones. This is something I can say based on my experience. In 2006, there were few of us. We were about ten, but from 2004 to 2006, there were none from Quebec. Our numbers keep increasing, and the contribution of the francophone caucus in the Conservative Party has been making quite a difference since 2006. I have witnessed that every day since then. The future is bright for the Conservative Party, whose members will sit on the other side of the aisle.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for the birth of his grandson. Hear, hear!

My hon. colleague made reference a few times to his being here since 2006. That is fantastic because, in 2009, the Bloc Québécois tabled exactly the same bill, and every Conservative, including my colleague for Lévis—Lotbinière, voted against it. It is quite peculiar to see them today, as they suddenly decide to vote for it.

What made them do an about-face? Is the large number of members from the Bloc Québécois scaring them? Voting against that bill looks to me like a real scandal.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

I was fortunate, if you can call it fortunate, to sit with his father. This demonstrates a certain continuity among francophones and shows that we are interested in politics and federal politics. The best proof that his father was a strong advocate of federal policy is that he is still receiving a federal pension. He never gave up his pension, even if he was in the Bloc Québécois. This shows that he always loved federal politics. He always liked being here, because he enjoyed it.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent speech and his incredible presentation, as well as the quality of his comments, which are very much in tune with what is currently happening.

Our party, and of course his party, along with all our colleagues in Quebec, wants to defend the French language to the best of our ability. The problem we are currently having with this government is that it does not keep its promises. One of its key promises in recent years was that it would modernize the Official Languages Act, but that has not yet been done. We are still waiting, and it plans to put out a white paper to once again delay the tabling of a modernized official languages act.

I would like my colleague to speak about this.

● (2030)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

A white paper filled with blank pages is what the Liberal Party is offering. All the solutions already exist. The committee has been working for years. We are asking for the modernization of the official languages. It is important to do this after 50 years. In 1988, some progress was made under a Conservative government. The

time has come. In a few months, the next Conservative government will make it a priority.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

Aside from being a means of communication, language is also an expression of our culture. It tells our stories and accompanies our dreams. Language gives us the ability to understand and help each other, and it helps us move forward.

Our sense of belonging to a community is built around a common language. Language and culture are passed on in various ways, through literature, visual arts, music, science, history, philosophy or dance. Among the main instruments of cultural transmission are television and radio. A long time ago other legislators in the House realized that and started demanding that television and radio contribute to the production of Canadian stories. Their decision was greatly beneficial to our cultural landscape.

However, the definition of television and radio has changed a lot since the last time the Broadcasting Act was updated, 30 years ago. In those days, we did not have touch screens or voice-activated devices. We were lucky if we could get the remote control to work on the first try. Nevertheless our laws remained unchanged since that distant past.

That is why I introduced Bill C-10 a few days ago. Its objective is simple: to extend the scope of the Broadcasting Act to online broadcasting services, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime or Spotify, and ensure that they too contribute to the production of Canadian stories, including francophone stories. It is a matter of fairness. The web giants can no longer ignore Canada's francophones and their culture. This is particularly important because francophones and their language and culture are a minority in North America.

In order to preserve French under such circumstances, we need more than just good intentions. That is why robust legislation is so important. Bill C-10 is a way of telling francophone artists that there is no us without them. Our reform recognizes the specific challenges they are facing and addresses them directly. Their work deserves to be more well known and better funded and broadcast.

Finally, I want to talk about Montreal, a francophone city that is rich in culture and heritage. It has been my adopted home for over 30 years. From the early days of radio and television, creators have looked for ways to represent and reflect all aspects of life in Montreal in their productions.

It has been captured in such songs as *Je reviendrai à Montréal* by Robert Charlebois and *Montréal* by Ariane Moffat. On screen, the city and its inhabitants have been immortalized in documentaries such as the recent *Chef en pandémie*, series such as *District 31* and *La vie, la vie*, the children's show *Passe-Partout*, and Montreal's distinct alleyways.

There are also those who make us laugh in French: Catherine Éthier, Eddy King, Rosalie Vaillancourt and Adib Alkhalidey. The Couscous Comedy Show stage in Montreal has launched quite a few acts now appearing on television and Apple Music.

In essence, Montreal inspires and sets the tone. It is a place where people can connect, where francophone productions around the world can collaborate. Montreal's stories, francophone stories, are there. They need to be seen and heard. Our children and grandchildren deserve to see themselves in those characters. They deserve a chance to write those stories themselves someday.

In 2016, I was honoured to be awarded the Impératif français prize for my contribution to the vitality of the language. It is not, however, my mother tongue. I learned to speak English before I learned to speak French. Switching from an English school to a French one was not without its challenges, but my mother felt that I ought to learn this beautiful language, and I have cultivated it throughout my life.

Winning the prize did not strike me as an end in itself. It was just a sign that I had to keep doing that work. Today, that commitment has brought me to my work as Minister of Canadian Heritage. Those who work to ensure the vitality of our language and our culture and to pass it on to others can count on our government to support, recognize and applaud their efforts.

• (2035)

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to something my colleague said at the beginning of his speech that I quite liked. He used the word “we” when talking about the common language. I find it rather surprising because generally when my colleagues across the way say “we” they misinterpret it.

There are two rather different systems of integration in Canada for indigenous minorities. My colleagues tend to favour multiculturalism. We think that interculturalism might be a better system of integration.

Every time we come back to this question and we try to defend the specificity of the Quebec culture, despite this “we” that my colleague was talking about, we get called all kinds of names.

I do not know how my colleague sees this, but I would like to know his impression of the integration system currently being used in Quebec and Canada.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

He seems to be having a hard time understanding that on this side of the House there are many proud Quebecers to whom protecting the French language is a concern and who are working to protect it in Quebec, of course, but also from one end of the country to the other.

We are doing this through tools such as the Official Languages Act or the Broadcasting Act. I will also soon be introducing a bill on the media and web giants. We are using every tool we have to continue to protect this language and our francophone communities, whether they are in Quebec or elsewhere in the country.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I am an anglophone and my riding has a large Acadian population. I attended French immersion in the only bilingual province, and I am very grateful for that.

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I also know how connected language is to a person's identity and how it can be threatened. This is what we are seeing with indigenous languages. Every day that the government puts off modernizing the Official Languages Act, it is contributing to the assimilation and regression of the language across the country, including in New Brunswick.

Now is the time to act.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her comments.

We had the pleasure of chatting recently. New Brunswick is a wonderful province I have had the opportunity of visiting many times.

I have written three books in French, and the book fairs there were even busier than in Montreal or Quebec City. The francophone community there is active, healthy and engaged.

That is why we want to continue to work with francophones in Quebec and across Canada, especially in the member's beautiful part of the country.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even if you normally are perfectly neutral, I want to mention that you are a Franco-Ontarian and an example and inspiration to us all.

I also want to bring up the quality and positiveness of the minister's comments on the French language, even if it sometimes there seems to be an insurmountable gap between us, ideologically speaking. I greatly appreciate his collaboration when we discuss less partisan issues. I also appreciated his collaboration on a number of recent files.

Here is my question for the minister. He and his party were elected on the promise that they would—

• (2040)

[*English*]

The Speaker: I would like to remind hon. members that their microphones may be live.

The member for Bonavista—Burin—Trinity might want to mute his microphone. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I am sorry. We have stopped the clock.

The hon. member may continue.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: My question to the minister is quite simple. He and his party were elected a year ago on the promise that they would modernize the Official Languages Act. As we know, the act first saw the light of day 51 years ago under Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Canada's 15th prime minister. There was an update in 1988 under Brian Mulroney. It goes without saying that another modernization is in order after 51 years. It is obvious.

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That being said, why is that party talking about tabling a white paper instead of modernizing the act? As the member for Lévis—Lotbinière said so eloquently, a white paper is only filled with blank pages. People want action, not white papers.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I greatly admire my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent. There are issues on which we disagree, but I do not think that the protection of French is one of them. I think that, like many others in this room, we both agree on this issue.

I think that our government has accomplished a lot since it took office in 2015. My predecessors at Canadian Heritage, who are here with us tonight, did a lot for CBC/Radio-Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts. We will continue to address other issues to do even more to protect francophones across the country.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in tonight's debate about the French language in Canada. It is very motivating.

I want to talk a little bit about my life. I am an Acadian from Nova Scotia. My ancestors arrived here in 1604. I am originally from Cape Breton, or more specifically from a little island just next door to Cape Breton called Isle Madame, which has a population of 3,500, 95% of whom are Acadian. I also have ancestors who contributed to the prosperity of Lévis. Their important role was even recognized with a monument that was built for Canada's centennial.

My father told me that, in the 1960s, there was only one French course at the school that I was attending in Nova Scotia and it was at risk of being cut. He said that we had to fight to protect our language. Thanks to the Liberal Party, which passed the Official Languages Act in 1969, we finally had the support we needed. My father said that we were going to see French thrive in our community, in Quebec and in Canada. We saw our brothers and sisters in Quebec as the leading champions of the French language and culture and as people who supported us.

I did all my schooling in English because there was no French school in those days. Again, in 1982, it was the Liberal Party who introduced the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, with section 23 protecting the rights of the anglophone minority in Quebec and the francophone minorities in the rest of Canada. We got some support from that. Then we went to court to defend our rights, obviously.

Lastly, French schools and francophone school councils started being created in 1990. In 2005 I was appointed as superintendent of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial. From 2005 until today, the number of students nearly doubled in francophone schools of Nova Scotia. We are very proud of that and we continue our work.

In the 1960s, French declined in Montreal. I remember my father telling me that story. Then in the 1970s, the language became stronger. Indeed a decline can be observed today. It is very important to act, and that is the reason why the Liberal Party is now taking action. In the Speech from the Throne, our government clearly demonstrated that the French language needed to be promoted and protected. That call to action was well received.

Benoît Pelletier said, and I quote, “The federal government has always wanted to ensure symmetry between English and French in Canada. Ottawa's acknowledgement that special measures need to be taken for francophones demonstrates the Trudeau government's recognition that French is under threat.”

Between 2015 and now, we have taken a great deal of action. The Official Languages Act just celebrated its 50th anniversary, and we will continue to work to promote French in Quebec. We will promote both linguistic cultures in Canada: English in Quebec and French outside of Quebec.

We can promote French in Quebec without infringing on minority rights. Yes, we can. I must say thank you to my hon. colleagues, my sisters and brothers in Quebec. I have seen how strongly they believe in francophones outside Quebec. They have made a difference by supporting Ontario's French-language university. I congratulate and thank them.

Promoting bilingualism in Canada and both linguistic communities is extremely important. Bilingualism is an asset for Canada. Our colleague, the Hon. Stéphane Dion, once said that bilingualism is an asset for the country's prosperity and that Canada's bilingual character increases the volume of its trade and economic relations, which are very important.

I will conclude by saying that a bilingual Canada is strong, and a francophone Quebec is very strong. A Canada with two strong linguistic minorities is very important. The Liberal government will work hard to ensure the promotion and protection of French across the country.

• (2045)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my regards to my colleague from Nova Scotia. I want him to know that my mother-in-law, who is a Samson, was at the dedication of the Samson family monument in Lévis. I appreciate your passion, Mr. Samson. One can feel your Latin fire, and it is very inspiring. It is true that, together, we want to see French make great strides across the country.

I would like to talk more about how the vitality of francophone linguistic minorities like yours in Nova Scotia is intertwined with the power of the French engine in Quebec. You talked about the importance of taking action.

We were both at the Standing Committee on Official Languages meeting yesterday. We passed a motion stating that the modernization plan must be tabled this year. All the communities that belong to the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Quebec Community Groups Network, including your own community, are calling for modernization.

Why wait if the time to act is now? Do you agree that it is time to act and that we need to see a modernization plan this year, not a white paper full of blank pages?

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The Speaker: Before I give the member the floor, I just want to remind all members that they have to ask their questions through the Chair, not directly to members. This evening we are having a very positive conversation, so it is not a problem, but when debate gets a little more heated, that can cause problems.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to thank my colleague. I often talk with him and I like him very much.

I would like to note that we have been taking action since 2015 and there has been tremendous progress since. We can talk about culture, CBC/Radio-Canada or the Translation Bureau, where the Conservatives made major cuts. Reinvestment was needed there. Of course we can talk about the court challenges program, which the Conservatives abolished and we had to reinstate. We can talk about the long form census, which supported francophones in Quebec and francophones and anglophones outside Quebec. It was abolished by the Conservatives. We can talk about the roadmap for official languages. In 10 years, the Conservatives made no investment in advancing Canada's francophonie.

I will have a lot more time to add to this list soon, when I join him in Parliament.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague for his passion. However, I have news for him. Since the Official Languages Act was adopted, statistics show that the percentage of francophones in other provinces has been steadily decreasing. Even in Quebec, on Montreal Island, we see that there is a threat and a steady decline. Even members of the Liberal Party recognize this.

This evening we heard several fine and congenial speeches. People have talked about their uncle, their aunt, their mother-in-law or their grandson. This is not a criticism; on the contrary, it is charming. However, I am asking for my colleague's opinion on the two concrete measures we are proposing to advance the French language. We usually hear that they are working hard for the middle class. This evening, we are hearing that they are working hard for the French language. We want more than that; we want measures. There are two measures: Welcoming new residents in French and letting Quebecers work in their language.

What does the member think of that?

● (2050)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I simply want to say to him that the Official Languages Act, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Quebec's Bill 101 are measures that complement one another. I will quote our colleague Stéphane Dion:

We had to make collective decisions that were sometimes difficult and often perceived as contradictory. Of course, the Official Languages Act and Bill 101, and even the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, have different sources of inspiration; however, these measures—despite what their respective supporters may believe—complement one another.

They have helped us move forward linguistically here, in Canada, and we will continue to work together to advance the francophonie in Canada.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure and privilege of participating in this debate on the status of the French language, in particular in Quebec.

I am moved by all of the speeches I have heard and by a warmth in the House that is radiating all the way here, in Lévis. I applaud my colleagues for that.

This evening, I will try to speak a little more slowly than normal, because I was not able to get my speech to the interpreters. Essentially, my message is that our linguistic duality is an asset, a part of the Canadian identity. Of course, language and culture go hand in hand.

This evening, we have seen this culture shine. Members have been naming artists and all kinds of cultural events. This is all part of and helps shape our Canadian identity, and Canadians recognize that it is an integral part of our identity.

We are currently facing the challenge of maintaining that duality. The French language, one of our two linguistic engines is facing some significant challenges. The decline of the French language affects our linguistic duality and goes to the very heart of our Canadian identity, which is why this debate is so important.

Members mentioned the road maps implemented by former minister Stéphane Dion. Stephen Harper's Conservative government worked with the former premier of New Brunswick, Bernard Lord, to create two road maps to promote and strengthen official language minority communities.

I heard my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière mention the Stephen Harper government's contribution to the promotion of linguistic duality, and that reminded me of a story. I was in Mexico with Mr. Harper, President Barack Obama and the former Mexican president, Mr. Peña Nieto. As always, Mr. Harper made a point of starting his speeches in French. Some U.S. networks even cut him off because they thought it was a foreign language. At the time, Mr. Obama just said that he agreed with everything Mr. Harper had said in French. Clearly, it is an effective diplomatic language.

Canada's linguistic duality has deep roots. It is said that French is the country's founding language. René Arseneault reminded us that the Acadians were there. The first French governors spoke French. Then the English made a contribution, and it is because of that pact that, today, we have a Canadian community that is open to the world and that also includes indigenous communities. At the core of this Canadian pact is the backbone of our identity and language, namely English and French. That is the challenge that we are facing today.

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Others have faced this challenge before us when the Official Languages Act was enacted 50 years ago. My colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent mentioned that a Conservative government modernized this legislation in 1988. For the first time, the act stipulated that English and French were to be promoted. That aspect of the act has been neglected, which is why it has become urgent that we modernize the Official Languages Act.

The situation has become urgent for two reasons. First, unfortunately, we are seeing a decline in French in Quebec and all our communities. Without wanting to be too negative, the number of people who use French in communities across Canada dropped dramatically between 2006 and 2016. French is seriously declining across the country. We have seen it recently in Quebec, particularly in Montreal. We are talking about an even more rapid decline in French there.

For example, demographer Marc Termote told us that we are in a downward spiral, a vicious circle of sorts, where English is thriving and French is declining. Our country's francophone foundation needs some repairs, a helping hand. This expert even said that there has been a drop in the number of people who speak French at home.

● (2055)

We are facing many challenges when it comes to the language, whether it is the spoken language, language of work, language of instruction or language of signage.

I see some colleagues who are on the Standing Committee on Official Languages taking part in the debate this evening. We agreed to address this. This evening we are having a take-note debate that I would say is just scratching the surface. There is a lot of work to be done. At the same time, the urgent need to take action is emerging. Groups and minorities across the country are calling for this. For instance, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, is telling us to do something. We are in a minority government situation. The president of the FCFA, Mr. Johnson, said:

We fear that if the government does not introduce a bill by the end of 2020, the two chambers of Parliament will not have enough time to adopt the changes that our communities have wanted for decades.

It is therefore important and urgent to take action, especially because work has been done by the Standing Committee on Official Languages and the FCFA. Recommendations have been made, and the work is done. This country is ripe for new legislation. We still have a few weeks ahead of us.

I have been listening to the presentations given by our government colleagues. They are saying that they want to take action and that they have plans. Now is the time to act, to make sure the laws are put in place. We are asking the government to act and to introduce its bill to modernize the Official Languages Act today, for two reasons.

First, all communities have been calling for it for decades, as Mr. Johnson said. It is a commitment, a will and a promise made by the party. It is also because several demographers, such as Frédéric

Lacroix, are telling us that the situation is “catastrophic”. This is the reason for tonight's debate. It is therefore time to take action, and there is a real need to act. The goal is really to take action.

My colleague from Victoriaville brought forward some concrete proposals to give the act some teeth. It is worth noting that the Official Languages Act is a quasi-constitutional law, which gives it primacy. That is why it is important that this act transcend the various departments and that it remain very close to the Treasury Board, in order to influence the entire federal bureaucracy, but also to explore new fields and become a partner in supporting the vitality of the French language in Quebec.

In any case, it has been a nice evening, and this is a constructive debate. It is interesting to hear the contribution and personal journey of each member in the House. My own family name is of Irish origin. This is proof that Quebec has the ability to integrate linguistic communities. My father married a Breton woman, and I am very proud of my fluency in French. I would say that I speak French quite a bit better than English.

I will close with that, and I look forward to my colleagues' questions.

● (2100)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am pleased to see you, a Franco-Ontarian, presiding over this debate. Two Franco-Ontarians are presiding over this debate, and that is inspiring.

My colleague has spoken a great deal about official languages. I am pleased to ask him this question. He spoke about the importance of francophones in minority communities and our role as the federal government. I know that, as a former minister, he understands the need for action.

Is he prepared to join us in condemning the budget cuts currently being made at Campus Saint-Jean in Alberta? It is a key institution for Franco-Albertans, and it is under threat from other Conservatives who are part of Jason Kenney's government.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for her question.

Her question is interesting, because the minister has the ability to support post-collegiate institutions across the country. It is the role of the federal government to assist institutions, and this role is entrenched in the current act. Campus Saint-Jean was founded by the Oblates and is truly an important beacon for the French language across western Canada. The minister has the ability to take action.

We know that the provincial governments are currently facing significant challenges because of the pandemic. We expect the government to fulfill its leadership role and support the communities, as we did when we were in office.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Chair, I know that I need to ask a question about the speech I just heard, but I want to give a quick preamble.

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This evening's debate feels like a love-in to me. I do not see Quebecers as a minority. They are unique. Our common language is French, we are the majority in French, we are unilingual francophones. We must be allowed to live in French, to teach French and to work in French. Quebecers will base decisions on what is done, not what is said.

My question has to do with some very concrete issues, such as the language of work, citizenship, barriers to the law and the Charter of the French Language in Quebec.

What are you prepared to do to promote and not restrict the French fact in Quebec?

• (2105)

The Deputy Chair: I remind the member that she must address her comments to the Chair, not to the member directly.

The hon. member has the floor.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, basically I can tell my colleague that we are in favour of applying the Charter of the French Language to federally regulated businesses. I can also tell her that we are in favour of adequate knowledge of French for candidates who want to obtain Canadian citizenship in Quebec. These are two firm commitments that we want to put forward.

We have also submitted solid recommendations for modernizing the Official Languages Act. These are five elements for ensuring that across the country, not just in Quebec, linguistic minority communities and the anglophone community can continue to move forward to maintain our linguistic vitality and linguistic duality which, as I was saying, is an integral part of our Canadian identity.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I know that he has always stood up for francophone rights across the country. He knows that several million people now speak French outside Quebec. There are of course francophones outside Quebec, but there is also a growing number of young francophiles across the country who are learning French in immersion schools, and who have an appetite for and interest in the French language.

I wanted to ask my colleague a very simple question. I know that he has travelled a lot through Canada and he knows where these pockets of francophiles and francophones are. Is it important to him that we continue to provide resources to increase the presence of francophones outside Quebec, but also that of francophiles who are learning French and want to learn and improve their French?

Is it important that the federal government play a key role in this?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. Like many people, I admire his mastery of the French language.

I want to tell him that I had the opportunity to visit Saint-Boniface. The first time I was there I was not even an MP. I felt like I was in Saint-Hyacinthe. I could sense the vitality of the language and the impact it was having on Winnipeg's development. Today, that has become a real asset. It is absolutely the government's role to do that.

What is new is that the federal government needs to be aware that, to maintain linguistic vitality, we need to promote and protect English and French, including French in Quebec. Quebec is joining minority language communities across the country. It has become a new large minority community.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Chair, my colleague spoke about the road maps that various governments presented in the past to advance the cause of French in Canada.

I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages since 2009. I was not there from 2011 to 2015, but I came back in 2015 and I have been there since then.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages made representations a number of times. Reports were submitted by both the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages and the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages. Many letters were sent to the minister, even in recent months. I found that out from various committee members, including the deputy chair and the chair.

These letters were sent directly to the Minister of Official Languages, who forgot something important in one of her answers to the House. She said that she had never received any correspondence in the five years since she became the Minister of Official Languages.

I would like to give my colleague the opportunity to correct the minister's mistake.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague and riding neighbour for his question. I also thank him for his outstanding contribution to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. In fact, he is one of the longest serving members of the committee. He has travelled the country and defended those communities.

Indeed, the Conservative Party communicated this in writing and verbally to the committee. Also, a motion was adopted yesterday calling on the government to introduce its bill before Christmas so that we can concretely support the vitality of linguistic communities across the country.

• (2110)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, I have heard a great list of Quebec artists this evening. I am hearing beautiful demonstrations of love for the French language, but the numbers prove that French is in decline in Montreal. What I am hearing tonight is talk, talk, talk. When will there be concrete action? For instance, Bill C-10 could include a percentage of francophone music, or the House could pass the Bloc Québécois bill that would make federally regulated companies subject to the Charter of the French Language.

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Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, we support applying the Charter of the French Language to federal bodies and we also want people applying for citizenship in Quebec to have a knowledge of French. We have concrete measures that will modernize the Official Languages Act, and we will continue take concrete action to support the vitality of linguistic communities. We could bring in a bit of culture and music as well.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Hochelaga.

First of all, I want to note that Marc-André Bédard has passed away. He was a great Quebecker who did a lot to modernize Quebec and who was, according to all those who were fortunate to meet him, a very gentle man who was very charismatic and intelligent. I offer my sincere condolences to his family, in particular to his son Eric, who I worked with at Fasken Martineau and who, when I was 26 years old, gave me my first piece of political advice when embarking on this political adventure. It was a very simple piece of advice. However, it is important to remember it, and easy to forget. He told me never to speak ill of my adversaries. That is very much the philosophy of the entire Bédard family. We should not be surprised because the apple does not fall far from the tree, of course.

As for the subject at hand this evening, I have a few comments to make in the little time I have available.

The first is that one cannot change what one is unaware of, be it because of ignorance or because one refuses to see things as they are. The fact is, when it comes to language, we know one thing with absolute certainty. French is in decline in Quebec. Many Quebeckers perceive this as a feeling they get from time to time, but one look at the numbers turns feeling into knowing, and that knowledge is deeply disturbing.

What do the numbers tell us?

Between 2001 and 2016, the number of Quebeckers reporting French as their mother tongue fell from 81.4% to 78%. It is the first time in the 150 years that these records have been kept, the first time since 1871, that the percentage of Quebeckers whose first language is French dropped below 80%. According to Statistics Canada, if this trend continues, the percentage of Quebeckers whose mother tongue is French will be somewhere between 69% and 72% by 2036.

The situation is even more dire in Montreal, where the percentage is five points lower than it was 15 years ago. Francophones now account for less than 50% of the population, and this is happening in the suburbs too, in places like Laval and even Longueuil. Demographer Marc Termote did a study for the Office québécois de la langue française in 2011, and such findings recently prompted him to state that things were progressing much faster than he thought just 10 years ago.

This is due in part to the fact that more and more people are speaking English. Unlike people who live in France or Belgium or even Spain or Portugal, people who live in Quebec are not removed from the magnetic attraction of English. They are immersed in its electromagnetic field. They are stuck right to the magnet.

It took craftiness, resilience, persistence, intelligence and courage to resist for four centuries and to still have a francophone society in the Americas. More than 100 years ago, Armand La Vergne's determination brought about the first language law in Quebec, and this determination was mirrored by Dr. Laurin and René Lévesque with Bill 101. Much like my former colleague, Stéphane Dion, I think this is a great piece of legislation, which enshrined the French language in law and cemented its place in Quebec, all while respecting the rights of the anglophone minority in Quebec, which was fundamental to the authors. This is just as important now as it was back then.

It is in our hands now, and to borrow the words of Antonio Gramsci, I am a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will. I sense that will in Quebec. I sense it here. We heard it in the throne speech.

Frankly, I am more concerned about the indifference I see and feel, especially among people of my generation. I hope with all of my heart that I am wrong, but I think this shows how important this evening's debate is.

I believe that we have an individual and collective duty, as Quebeckers, to ensure that the French language is passed on and that it survives. Our language is central to the soul and character of the Quebec people.

• (2115)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Chair, it is rare for a Liberal member to quote René Lévesque.

I think that is interesting and fantastic. If Quebec were a country, I do not think that we would be talking about the decline of French in Montreal today, but that is not currently the case.

From the beginning, we have been told that we are causing division with our bill, which calls for Bill 101 to apply to federally regulated businesses in Quebec. We have seen that agreements have been made. For example, standards set by the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail apply in the Port of Montreal because the commission has an agreement with the federal government.

What is the problem? If an agreement can be reached with the government regarding health and safety, why can Bill 101 not apply to federally regulated businesses in Quebec?

We are being told that our bill is divisive. The Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion in that regard. The three opposition parties in Ottawa support the bill. Who is being divisive? In my opinion, it is the Liberals.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, I might surprise my colleague again, because I recently learned that I share ancestors with René Lévesque: Robert Lévesque, from Rivière-Ouelle, and Jeanne Chevalier.

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It goes back many generations, but there it is all the same. I am a Lightbound, I was born under the rose, but I was raised under the lily in Quebec City by a Lévesque mother and a Lightbound father. The two linguistic solitudes flow through in my veins, so to speak.

The will I spoke of, I can feel it. We heard it in the Speech from the Throne. The Minister of Official Languages is doing an incredible job of protecting and promoting French in Quebec and across the country. I have full confidence in the minister.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Chair, I really enjoyed the comments made by my colleague from Louis-Hébert.

They were intelligent, eloquent and relevant. His genealogy is interesting and we also understand that the apple did not fall far from the tree, to say the least.

My colleague mentioned the former Liberal leader, Stéphane Dion. I would remind members that Stéphane Dion is the former member for Saint-Laurent and that the current member for Saint-Laurent has perhaps not been a credit to her predecessor.

The member for Louis-Hébert's party has been elected and re-elected for the past five years based on the promise and commitment to overhaul the Official Languages Act. However, after five years, we are no further ahead. Based on the Speech from the Throne, we expected that there would be a specific announcement on the overhaul of the Official Languages Act. However, that was not the case, and all we are learning today is that the government is going to table a white paper.

Why a white paper, when we need action, not just reflection?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, I am very proud of the work that the hon. member for Ahuntsic-Cartierville and minister responsible for official languages is doing. She is working hard to modernize the Official Languages Act.

I am a bit perplexed. The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent ran in the election with full knowledge of the facts after a decade of darkness for the French fact in Canada. Stephen Harper gutted the budgets at CBC/Radio-Canada and appointed unilingual anglophones to serve as Auditor General and on the Supreme Court. With such contempt for French—

The Deputy Chair: We have time for a brief question.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Chair, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois was surprised to hear a Liberal MP quote René Lévesque, but I am even more surprised that he can quote Gramsci. I find that fascinating, and I would love to debate that with him.

Does he not think that the broadcasting bill should include clear directives and guidelines on the creation of original French-language film, television and radio content in Quebec and Canada?

• (2120)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, the sector was calling for new broadcasting legislation. I think our government will always be motivated to promote the most Canadian content and more French-language content.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, it is my turn to thank the House for the opportunity to speak in this important debate.

I join my hon. colleagues in this debate on the status of the French language in Quebec and our government's commitment to protecting and promoting the French language.

Anyone who knows me knows that even though I was not born here, I am a Montrealer and Quebecker through and through. I am now the member of Parliament for Hochelaga, and I am proud to be so connected to my community.

I came to Canada in 1980 with my single mother. We settled in the heart of the francophone community in eastern Montreal. I grew up in the age of Bill 101, and I learned French, which I speak today in the House, and my family and children learned it as well. Many people are surprised by my French, because I do not appear to have an accent. Actually, I have a Québécois accent, and I am proud of it.

Today, I represent the people of Hochelaga, a bastion of francophone culture in Montreal. From the Maisonneuve market to Place Simon-Valois to Ontario Street, we are proud to live in French.

This is not always easy. The use of French is declining in Montreal, and that worries me. It worries all of us here in the House. In Quebec, French is being used less as the primary language spoken or language of work. More and more stores are greeting customers in a language other than French. As a Montrealer, a Quebecker and a francophone, I find this worrisome.

It is extraordinary that we are all having a conversation here about the decline of the French language. As my colleague Pablo Rodriguez said earlier this evening—

The Deputy Chair: I would remind the parliamentary secretary that she must not identify members by their names. She must use only their titles.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Chair, can I excuse myself on the grounds that I am new here?

There is no single solution, no small action we can take. A whole series of measures is needed, and those measures will require all of us to really want to protect French.

For the first time, the federal government is recognizing that there is a minority in Canada and North America: the francophone community. I am the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Most importantly, I am an immigrant who went through the French integration process and the newcomer classes and who watched her mother make a concerted effort to integrate into her new city. To me, it is obvious that immigration is important and crucial to the future of French.

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Our government is responsible for ensuring that the newcomers who come to Canada every year without knowing French start to learn French. We do that by transferring significant amounts of money to Quebec to support French integration, under the Canada-Quebec accord, which gives Quebec the exclusive power to select immigrants in several categories and to ensure that considerations such as French are respected and maintained.

According to Quebec's 2016 Samson report, more than 43% of those who settle in the Montreal area do not speak French when they arrive in Canada. As for the rest of Quebec, the statistics are a little more encouraging. Between 75% and 89% of newcomers, depending on the immigration class, say they speak French. However, 54% of those in the economic immigration class do not speak French when they arrive.

That is why investments in French integration are essential to ensure that all immigrants and newcomers like me, my family and my children can learn French, integrate into the host society, work in French, be taught in French and consume culture in French.

That is why the bill to modernize the Broadcasting Act put forward by my colleague the Minister of Canadian Heritage is important.

Like all members of the House, I want to ensure that we work together for the future of Quebec and Montreal in French because they must continue to be the cradle of the francophonie in North America.

• (2125)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Chair, I congratulate my colleague on her speech. We have talked a bit about the situation in Montreal.

We have heard a lot of Liberal support recently for Bill 101. What does the member think the purpose of Bill 101 was, and what language planning model is it based on?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague and riding neighbour for his question.

I have always said that I was a child of Bill 101. It is because of Bill 101 that I, as an immigrant, speak French today. Our government will continue to promote and protect the French language.

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

I also salute her because she is my neighbour and a fellow Montrealer. We share many realities regarding the situation and the precariousness of the French language.

If she is so convinced of the need to give workers the right to work and live in French, why does her government seem to be blocking the NDP's idea of applying the Charter of the French Language to federally regulated businesses?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his question. We are indeed neighbours, and our Montreal ridings each include a portion of the eastern part of Rosemont.

Interestingly, the 2016 Samson report concluded that a course correction was needed to strengthen the position of French as Que-

bec's common tongue, beginning with enhanced measures to help those who choose to come live here learn the language.

My colleague is well aware that many more immigrants are settling in Rosemont, in his riding. We need to make sure that immigrants can work and be taught in French. That is what we want to do.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Chair, I really appreciate what the member said. She can certainly be proud to say that she is a child of Bill 101.

As I have said before and am proud to say again, those who have benefited most from Bill 101 are newcomer children and the anglophone community, which have been given a chance to learn French. These people became bilingual thanks to Bill 101, and children of immigrants speak unaccented French, or those in Quebec do, anyway.

She wants to focus on Bill 101, which had the support of the former member for Saint-Laurent, Stéphane Dion, as someone mentioned earlier.

However, if French is under threat, why not do whatever it takes to apply Bill 101 to areas under federal jurisdiction? What does the member think of that?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Chair, I thank my opposition colleague for his question.

I would like to remind members that French is protected not just by one measure but by a series of measures. Over the past five years, our government has been working to protect French in Quebec, and we will continue to do so. I look forward to seeing the modernization plan that the Minister of Official Languages is going to present.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have a good question for my colleague, because I know that she is a strong advocate for official languages and also for immigration.

Our government implemented several measures with respect to francophone immigration. I would like her to inform the House of our various initiatives.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for her question.

One of the most important things is that for the first time, in the plan for immigration levels, there is a specific line for francophone immigration. This demonstrates the importance of maintaining the proportion of francophones across the country.

• (2130)

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Chair, I am proud to address you in French this evening as an MP from the Quebec nation and the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Government Orders

Language issues have always been very important to me. I am a member of the Canadian Branch of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* and I also have an international responsibility. I have the privilege of chairing the Parliamentary Affairs Committee, which represents more than 88 parliaments that use and promote French.

Let's get right to the point. The decline in the language of Molière in the beautiful province of Quebec, particularly in the Montreal region, is real, and I am extremely concerned. The same sort of thing is happening in francophone communities outside Quebec and, as parliamentarians, we need to protect the language. Statistics show beyond a shadow of a doubt that there has been a decline in the use of spoken French at work and at home in Quebec.

An article published by *Le Devoir* in 2019 indicated that the number of people who speak French most often at home is dropping by 1%. That may not seem like much, but if we lose 1% every year, then we will lose a lot and francophones will no longer be heard by their communities.

This decline may seem minor, but it will translate to much bigger losses in the next 20 years. We need to act now.

Quebeckers are concerned. According to a Leger Marketing survey, nearly six in 10 Quebeckers feel that the situation has gotten worse in the past decade. The same proportion of people feel that the use of French will continue to decline over the next decade. Sixty-three per cent of respondents said that they were concerned about the situation of French. I repeat: I am very concerned for our future generations.

However, what I find most embarrassing is the Liberal government's inaction. Seriously, I ask myself this question a lot: Where have the Liberal members from Quebec been for the past five years? Back in 2015, this government campaigned on promises about official languages.

I must say that over the past year and in recent days, the Quebec Liberal caucus has shown that it has no respect for or credibility when it comes to the French language. First of all, in the WE Charity scandal, the Liberal government awarded an untendered contract to an organization with no ties to Quebec and no way of communicating with francophone Canadians.

In recent weeks, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, a Quebecker, introduced Bill C-10 to modernize the Broadcasting Act. There is no provision to ensure that French is protected.

As if that were not enough, the member for Saint-Laurent expressed doubts about the decline of French in Montreal, and the Quebec president of the Liberal Party agreed. Without mincing words, and said that Bill 101 is quite simply oppressive.

We might have thought it was a lapse in judgment or a misinterpretation of what the member for Saint-Laurent said. However, a few minutes after she quit the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the member for Saint-Laurent was at it again. She "liked" a tweet that said that the crisis around the decline of French was exaggerated. Seriously, it is unacceptable. Was she expressing what the Liberal MPs from Quebec are thinking? Maybe.

When we add it all up, we can say that we know the current government's real opinion on the decline of French, despite the fine words from the Minister of Official Languages and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. The Minister of Official Languages often likes to say in this chamber that our political party has no lessons to give her party. I would just like to take this opportunity to remind her that it was the Conservative Party of Canada, led by the Hon. Brian Mulroney, that repealed the Official Languages Act in 1988. The Liberals can brag outside the House and say that they were the ones who brought in this legislation in 1969, but again, history shows that it was the Conservatives that had to improve policies brought in by the Liberal Party.

● (2135)

That statement is not unfounded. According to Linda Cardinal, a political scientist and research chair in Canadian francophonie and public policy at the University of Ottawa, "The 1969 legislation had no real might. It conferred primarily political rights, whereas the 1988 legislation had more to do with human rights."

The Conservative Party has always made it a priority to defend the interests of people across the country, and amendments to that act certainly made things better for all francophones across the country. However, the act is in dire need of an overhaul because it is 2020 and the act has not been modernized in over 30 years.

In 2017, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages asked parliamentarians to modernize the act, but the government never did more than talk, like the lyrics from that famous song that goes, "Words, words, words". I do not sing as well as the member for Shefford. I do not have that talent.

I would add that the government has nothing but words to offer Canadians. When it is time to put plans into action, this government simply cannot.

In June 2018, Mark Power and Darius Bossé, lawyers working in the area of language rights, wrote in an op-ed that the survival of French in Canada requires a thorough revision of the federal Official Languages Act. I could mention several other experts who have publicly criticized the current situation. In spite of everything, it is obvious that there is no linguistic sensitivity on the part of this government. To this day, the member for Ahuntsic-Cartierville and Minister of Official Languages cannot tell us when she will introduce her legislation to modernize the act.

When I was preparing this speech, I was surprised to learn that the current Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry in this government voted against the Conservative motion moved in 2006 recognizing the Quebec nation and, by extension, the importance of French in Quebec. Worse still, 15 Liberal members voted against that motion. That is not counting those who did not show up for the vote. Fifteen Liberals voted against that motion, and several others were absent. We can therefore conclude that the member for Saint-Laurent is not the only one in the Liberal Party of Canada caucus who does not really care about the decline of French.

Government Orders

There is a genuine consensus on our side of the House. Our leader publicly announced it a few months ago. He did not play politics like the members opposite. He was clear about the issue and our caucus has been too. We will always respect Quebec's areas of jurisdiction and work with Quebec's elected officials as real partners.

We agree with the Legault government that Bill 101 should be applied to federally regulated businesses in Quebec. Quebeckers deserve to be represented by members who will stand up for them, who will defend the French language and who are able to say loud and clear without any ambiguity that French is declining in Quebec and Montreal.

I would like to close with a famous quote by Albert Camus, which represents the essence of my political commitment and which should inspire the member for Saint-Laurent and the other members of the Liberal Party. He said, "Democracy is not the law of the majority but the protection of the minority".

Liberal members from Quebec did not do their duty and the Minister of Official Languages is not doing anything to resolve the situation, but we will continue to protect and defend our two official languages in Montreal, Quebec and all across Canada.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for his intervention.

I have two questions about the criticisms of Bill C-10 on broadcasting. On the issue of percentages in the bill, the Association québécoise de la production médiatique said, "The AQPM believes that it would be hard to include percentages in the legislation and that it is better to go before the CRTC to debate better conditions to impose on online broadcasters and undertakings." That is what independent producers are saying and that is what ADISQ, the Association québécoise de l'industrie du disque, du spectacle et de la vidéo says. By the way, ADISQ says it is grateful to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and his team for being so receptive.

Will the Conservative Party vote in favour of Bill C-10?

• (2140)

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I appreciate the question from the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

He just quoted two organizations. I have a list of more than 25 organizations that do not agree with his bill. This evening, it is important that we work together, recognize the problem of the French language in Montreal, start working on it and stop saying that they are working hard.

They must give us a date for the modernization of the Official Languages Act. Will it be before December 31, 2020?

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his speech.

What I am hearing is a little disheartening. I think we are seeing an attempt to seduce future Quebec and francophone voters. I somewhat deplore the fact that the good intentions of the two parties that were in power for several years have not yielded results as there has been a catastrophic decline in French, in Montreal in particular.

I would like to know if our Conservative colleague would support the request we made to the Minister of Canadian Heritage to require and ensure that we have 40% of original French content and 5% of indigenous content in the next version of the Broadcasting Act.

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix. The lights have come on in Charlevoix.

I simply want to assure my esteemed colleagues that when the Conservative Party of Canada is in power we will do everything we can to protect the act and official languages. We will implement measures to help us keep our commitments.

It is a fact that the current government, which has been in power for five years, has not delivered. We have a good record, and when we are in power we will implement measures to protect official languages.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his speech.

There are of course some concerns. Many Quebeckers cannot necessarily work in French in Quebec. The matter of French-language services in downtown Montreal is also worrisome.

Still, there are some encouraging statistics. There are millions of francophones and francophiles outside Quebec, 95% of Quebeckers are able to have a conversation in French, and the number of francophones on the planet continues to rise. Projections show that there will be between 500 million and one billion francophones in the world in the next 30 years. Those are encouraging figures.

Could my colleague tell us how to implement solutions to take advantage of this growing interest in the French language, while taking into account that it is not necessarily possible for many companies, especially American ones, in downtown Montreal to offer French-language services, and that Quebeckers do not necessarily have the right to work in French in federally regulated institutions or businesses?

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby.

One way to advance the French language and encourage people to use it is to promote it. This is not about pitting English and French against each other but about encouraging people to take pride in speaking French. In other countries, there has been an increase in the number of people who speak French.

Why is the French language declining in Canada? Why has nothing been done in five years? My colleague's question is very relevant and we should promote French so that people are proud to speak it.

Government Orders

• (2145)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Chair, in his speech, my colleague spoke about witnesses who submitted reports and who appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages to testify about the importance of modernizing the act.

Witnesses not only appeared as individuals and as researchers to tell us that, but organizations like the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada or FCFA, even came up with an entire bill, from A to Z, that they submitted to the Senate and our committee for review to speed up the development of new legislation.

I would like to ask my colleague whether the Standing Committee on Official Languages, which the minister says is independent, can immediately come up with a government plan based on all of the reports that were submitted.

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I truly appreciated the privilege of working with my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

I had the privilege of being a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for a few months and meeting with organizations. They are so convinced of the need to update the Official Languages Act that instead of preparing reports, briefs and testimony, they have actually drafted a bill. Everything is all there, it is ready to go, but the Liberals do not want to move forward. What we are hearing from the Minister of Official Languages is that they are working hard. They have been working hard for five years on this file and many others.

When will the Minister of Official Languages table her bill to modernize the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Chair, my colleague concluded his speech with a quote from Camus. For those familiar with Camus, that is something of a surprise. For my colleague's information, Camus separated his work into two cycles. The first cycle is absurdity.

Maybe we can talk about absurdity this evening because of all these people who are in favour of Bill 101. In 1977, when it was introduced, both the Liberals and the Conservatives were staunchly opposed to it because it was going to create inequalities by giving allophones the right to attend English-language schools. Everybody strongly opposed it.

Earlier, the member for Hochelaga shared an example of what Bill 101 does. She was a child of Bill 101 who learned French and was educated in French schools. I find that quite surprising.

Then there was a discussion about applying Bill 101 to federally regulated companies. That was introduced in 2009—this is Camus's cycle of the absurd—and nobody from the Conservative Party voted in favour of it. Every time a measure is put forward to support French, it comes from a separatist party.

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I salute my colleague from Jonquière.

My answer to him is that I will respect all members of the House. I will let the people of Quebec judge the arrogance he just demon-

strated. Earlier, his leader simply mentioned the NDP and the Bloc Québécois.

Tonight we are working for official languages. The “who” is not important. We have an important issue in Quebec, and that is the French language. We need to stand up, we need to respect one another, and the Bloc Québécois does not have a monopoly on the truth.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mount Royal.

A strong culture attracts supporters. New members of that culture become allies, and allies create partnerships together.

Not far away, we have an example of a culture that has an enormous power of attraction, that of the United States, whose cultural works, in the broadest sense of the term, such as arts, sports, entertainment, and even video games, attract audiences from all over the world. These audiences readily expose themselves to the symbols and values of American society.

However, I would like to focus more on the power of attraction of the French language, which needs to be strengthened. I would like to share my wife's story. She is originally from Alberta.

She might not like that I am talking about her in the House, but she deserves the attention because of all she does to help me have this political career. Everyone in the House understands what I mean.

My wife's mother is an American who married a Canadian and made a life in Canada, in western Canada. Once in Canada, she was taken with Pierre Trudeau's vision, by the idea of French Power in Ottawa, the Official Languages Act and Canadian biculturalism. This woman who originally had no connection to French chose to enrol her four children in French immersion in Calgary.

That experience had a profound impact on my wife, who later went to university to become a social sciences teacher in French immersion. In other words, she studied so she could promote the French language. Her love of French is what brought her to Quebec, where she even worked one summer as a young guide at the National Assembly, showing Quebecers the splendour of their legislature.

In Calgary, not only did my wife learn French, but she also got a taste of Quebec culture. I will never forget when I suggested that we go see Luc de Larochellière at the Francofolies. To my great surprise, she already knew his music, as well as the music of Michel Rivard and Richard Séguin. Her teachers in Calgary were Quebec francophones. They shared their culture with their students. I say all this to provide an example of the power of attraction of the French language and Quebec culture.

French grows stronger and flourishes through its ability to attract supporters, including among newcomers. Any minority culture has to deal with the soft power of nearby majority cultures, such as the American culture that has the technological and economic clout to spread its influence.

Government Orders

The federal government has a role to play in supporting the French fact in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. It has the means and the duty to work to boost the appeal of French. It has regulatory power through the CRTC and under the Broadcasting Act, both of which are covered by Bill C-10, which the Minister of Canadian Heritage just introduced. The government has Radio-Canada, which deserves to get the funding it needs to continue to be one of the main beacons of French language and culture in Quebec and Canada. The government has substantial budgets for funding French-language content that reflects francophone culture with the help of the web giants that will now be required to contribute under Bill C-10. The government also has the Official Languages Act.

The vitality of a people depends on its culture. Culture is how it sustains itself, thrives and reaches out to others.

• (2150)

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

I want to repeat what I said earlier. This evening, we have heard a lot of fine speeches, a lot of declarations of love and quotes from artists or works.

Emotional speeches are all well and good, but we are proposing concrete measures and I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on that.

We want to allow Quebec to welcome its new residents in French by requiring them to have a minimum knowledge of the language. We also want to enable Quebecers who work for federally regulated businesses to be able to work in their own language.

The Liberals have been singing the praises of Bill 101 for almost four hours now.

Why not simply apply it? I do not understand why they are stalling. I would like to know what my colleague thinks about that.

• (2155)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Chair, in the past six years, the Liberal government has taken concrete action in a number of areas, one of which is francophone immigration. These are meaningful steps.

In June 2017, the immigration department decided to award additional points for knowledge of French in the express entry system. In the fall of 2018, the department designated a second French language testing organization for economic immigration applicants. This is in addition to other measures the government has taken to support francophones across Canada.

It is completely untrue to say that the Liberal government has done nothing. We will continue to do more. We will modernize the Official Languages Act. This modernization will certainly include some significant measures to strengthen the French language in Quebec and Canada.

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

The NDP agrees. We are pushing for federally regulated businesses in Quebec to be subject to the Charter of the French Language.

I have a more specific question for my colleague about the need to modernize the Official Languages Act.

Why does the government seem to prefer issuing a white paper instead of introducing a bill to quickly modernize the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Chair, the white paper is part of a consultation process.

The objective of a consultation is to gather all of the best ideas. Reforming the Official Languages Act is very important, so we need to make sure that we gather the best ideas and the best possible solutions. It is normal for a government to consult the public and stakeholders in order to draft the most effective bill possible.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Chair, the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé has said a number of times this evening that nothing people have been saying amounts to anything more than words and that nothing has been accomplished.

I have a question for my hon. colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis. The federal government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Telefilm Canada, Musicaction and the Canada Media Fund to support French music, French television series and French films, many of which have reached international audiences.

Does he see this as concrete action on the part of the federal government?

Let's also consider the \$4 billion we invested in arts and culture, a significant chunk of which went to francophone artists in Quebec and across Canada.

Does my colleague see all that as concrete action in support of the French language from coast to coast to coast?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Chair, it is very concrete.

Members of a society need to be able to see themselves in the stories they watch on television and in the movies, in books, and in their music.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Madam Chair, Jean Chrétien often talked about the Canada he believed in.

It was a Canada in which one could be francophone and feel at home in Vancouver or in Halifax. It was a Canada in which one could be anglophone and feel at home in Montreal or Gaspé. I still believe in that vision of Canada, a Canada where bilingualism is as much a part of our national identity as hockey or maple syrup.

Government Orders

[English]

Canada was created as a contract between English-speaking and French-speaking communities. The destinies of both communities are in inextricably linked together in this great country. We need to recognize the very legitimate fears French-speaking Canadians have living as a minority on the North American continent. I am saying this in English because I want English-speaking Canadians to hear it.

The throne speech has, for the first time, recognized our responsibility as a federal government to protect and promote French in Quebec. I support this. I am an English-speaking Quebecker, just like my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were before me. I have lived my entire life on the Island of Montreal, a place I love. Here, French and English speakers live together, work together and often love one another. We are no longer the two solitudes Hugh MacLennan wrote about, but sometimes, sadly, both our communities still struggle to understand each other.

• (2200)

[Translation]

Today, the debate focuses on Quebec and Montreal. We must continue our efforts to ensure that French remains the common language in Quebec. When we talk about languages in Canada, we cannot forget the concerns of francophone minority communities outside Quebec. These communities need strong support from the federal government to flourish.

In Quebec, francophones form the majority. The provincial government adopted many measures that impose the use of French. The rules around education ensure that most newcomers to Quebec integrate into the francophone community.

Despite everything, francophone Quebeckers have legitimate fears about their ability to live, work and be served in their language and about their ability to integrate new immigrants.

I was recently moved by the account of one of my colleagues who stated that he had not managed to be served in French in certain stores in downtown Montreal. That is unacceptable. Montreal is the largest city in the province where the majority of people are francophone. Every Quebecker who lives in or visits Montreal has the right to expect to be served in French.

That said, I would like to share with the House some concerns of anglophone minority communities in Quebec because, in order to collaborate, we must understand one another.

[English]

As an English-speaking Quebecker, let me speak to some fears that my community faces. Our community is shrinking. Hundreds of thousands of people have left our province. In my own family, my only sibling no longer lives in Quebec, nor do any of my four first cousins. Most of the friends I grew up with have left this province.

English-speaking seniors often live in isolation because their children have moved away. Our schools are closing. Many English-speaking Quebeckers, particularly outside of Montreal, have trouble accessing health and social services in English.

There are currently calls to reduce funding to the institutions founded by our community. This despite the fact that all our institutions are open to everyone. Our hospitals, such as the world-leading Jewish General Hospital in my riding of Mount Royal, are bilingual. More than one-third of the patients treated there are francophones, and they are treated in French.

We make up less than 1% of the provincial civil service, despite representing over 13% of the population. English-speaking Quebeckers also have our legitimate fears. Any discussion must include us too.

[Translation]

We have made progress. We recognize that French is the common language in Quebec. We have become bilingual. Only 37% of us were bilingual in 1971. Now 71% speak Quebec's official language.

Anglophone Quebeckers are not rejecting French. We are and should be allies, a bridge between francophone Quebeckers and other anglophone Canadians. Our support will help promote the French fact in North America.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He mentioned the challenges facing the anglophone minority community in Montreal.

Does my colleague agree with the organization that represents that community, the Quebec Community Groups Network? He is very familiar with organizations that defend minority communities in Quebec. Does he agree with me, and more importantly with that organization, that a plan to modernize the Official Languages Act must be introduced this year, rather than a white paper?

Also, does my colleague agree that French is in decline in Montreal?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, first of all, yes, certain studies have shown that French is in decline in Montreal. There is no doubt about that.

Second, I want to say what a pleasure it is to work with my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis. We are both swimmers and we have a lot in common. We are working together, and if I were on the same parliamentary committee, I would also vote in favour of modernizing the act.

In closing, I would like to say that the Minister of Official Languages is not just a colleague; I also have the pleasure of being her friend. I know she is working every day, all day long, to produce something as quickly as possible. She has my full confidence.

Government Orders

• (2205)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Chair, my colleague is implying that he recognizes that French is in decline, but in his presentation he said the opposite. He said that most immigrants integrate in French, which is not the case at all. Language transfer of allophones to French is 10 times lower than transfer to English, all things being relative. I am shocked by what the hon. member is saying.

The last time we introduced the bill on applying Bill 101 to federal institutions, he reacted strongly by saying that anglophones in Quebec had fewer rights than everyone else.

Did he mean that anglophones in Quebec should have the right to speak English only and disregard French, the common language?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, I value my friendship with the member, even though we do not agree. We do not have to be adversaries; we can disagree.

I urge my colleague to go back and listen to the excellent speech by my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. He gave some real figures on the integration of immigrants. A great deal of progress has been made on French language classes for immigrants. More and more of them are speaking French at home, and fewer and fewer are speaking English.

I completely agree on French language training for immigrants to Quebec. My anger last time was not because I did not think there was a problem with the language of work in Quebec. However, I think it is very important to consider and protect the rights of anglophones, while protecting the French language in Quebec.

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

I share a home with my wife, who comes from Montreal's anglophone community. However, she is also a child of Bill 101 and now works in French. She is very proud of that.

If my Liberal colleague agrees that Bill 101 has helped several communities in Quebec and the French fact in Quebec, why is his government opposed to subjecting federally regulated businesses to the Charter of the French Language?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. It is always a pleasure to work with him.

I think that all levels of government have a duty to legislate within their own jurisdictions to promote and protect the French language. That is what we will do with the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Chair, the issue of French in Montreal is crucial because the fate of French in Quebec is being played out in Montreal. Basically, the fate of French in Canada and North America is being played out in Montreal, because the Montreal metropolitan area is home to almost 50% of Quebec's population and welcomes 90% of newcomers, within a few decimal places. We must therefore act quickly.

I will give some statistics, but it is important to remember that Montreal is responsible for welcoming and integrating immigrants

and new citizens into the French community for Quebec as a whole. When it comes to the mother tongue, some people say that it should not be taken into account. I agree that it is not the most important indicator, but the mother tongue accounts for intergenerational transmission to some extent, because we pass on our mother tongue to future generations. When allophones or francophones transfer to English, that becomes the mother tongue of their children. In Montreal, there is no doubt that French is rapidly declining as a mother tongue.

Let us look at the language of use, which is a much more meaningful indicator. On the Island of Montreal, between 2001 and 2016, the percentage of people who said French was their language of use dropped from 56.4% to 53.1%, a 3% decrease. For English, over the same period, the percentage rose from 25% to 25.1%, for a 1% increase.

In the greater Montreal area, between 2001 and 2016, French dropped from 70.7% to 68.4%. In only 15 years, that is a 2.3% decrease. English went from 17.4% to 17%, which is also a decrease, but of 0.4% only.

For Quebec as a whole, use of French decreased from 83.1% to 80.6%, a 2.5% reduction over 15 years. That is enormous. English, meanwhile, increased by 0.2%, from 10.5% to 10.7%. Charles Castonguay said that for the first time in Quebec's history, French was receding as the proportion of anglophones increased.

Earlier, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie said that there had been an improvement and that more immigrants were integrating in French. That is partially true because language transfers to French increased from 46% to 54%. However, it is important to understand that 46% of transfers to English, with just over 10% of people who speak English at home is huge, while for 80% of people who speak French at home, only 56% switched to French. That is progress but it is not enough, because to maintain our demographic weight, we need at least 90% of language transfers to be toward French.

Why has there been an increase? It is because the Government of Quebec selected more immigrants who are francophone or who already speak French, so that is not an impact of Bill 101. A disproportionate number of newcomers who become anglicized tend to leave Quebec. That gives the impression that language transfers to French are increasing.

When we look at the language vitality indicator, we see that the proportion of people with French as their mother tongue on the Island of Montreal increased by 6% in 2011 through language transfers. In 2016, it was 10% more. For English, in 2001, there were 41% more people who spoke English at home than people who had English as a mother tongue. That number was 45% in 2016.

For the greater Montreal area, French increased by 2% in 2001 because of language transfers and by 6% in 2016. English increased from 24% to 42% because of language transfers. For Quebec as a whole, French increased by 2% in 2001 and by 3% in 2016 because of allophones switching to French. English increased by 26% in 2011 and 32% in 2016 for that same reason.

• (2210)

We see that French's power of attraction is not strong enough. A study on language planning around the world showed that to ensure the future of a language, it has to be the official and common language of a given territory. These models are based more on the principle of territoriality and collective rights, as seen in Belgium and Switzerland, countries that have several national languages. In Belgium, on the Flemish side, everything happens in Dutch. That does not stop people from learning three or four other second languages very well, but Dutch is not threatened even though it is a language that is not spoken much around the world.

That is the model that inspired Bill 101. Once Bill 101 was established, there was real progress in French and an increase in language transfer.

However, as soon as every Supreme Court ruling started chipping away at Bill 101, and especially when the Constitution was patriated, judges from every federal court in Quebec weakened Bill 101 in almost every application sector. In 1982, the government imposed a Constitution and a Charter of Rights and Freedoms on us that completely undermined the educational part of Bill 101, which was the most important part.

Our colleague from Mount Royal was a member of Alliance Québec, a group that fought a real legal guerilla war against Bill 101 and whose fight was subsidized by the federal government. The Official Languages Act is based on a model that invariably leads to the assimilation of minority languages. It is a kind of institutional bilingualism centred on individual rights that produces the same result all over the world, namely the assimilation of minority languages. In spite of that, the situation of francophone and Acadian communities improved because French schools and government services in French used to be forbidden in just about all the provinces. People really needed to mobilize for change to occur, and the Official Languages Act finally came, offering a smattering of services in French. Unfortunately, they are largely insufficient. With every census, we also see an increase in the rate of assimilation and anglicization of francophones outside Quebec.

Certain budgets are associated with the Official Languages Act. That is what I was talking about earlier. Some \$80 million a year is earmarked exclusively for anglophone pressure groups, groups like the Quebec Community Network, which appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages not long ago. Its representatives said that the education measures were a violation of civil rights, despite the fact that this is how it is done around the world. Go to the United States and ask for French public schools. It is not going to happen. In the rest of Canada, many francophones do not have access to French-language schools.

One of the speakers talked about Frédéric Lacroix's book entitled *Pourquoi la loi 101 est un échec*, or "why Bill 101 is a failure". The author concludes that the situation is catastrophic in Montreal because the worse it gets, the more language transfers to English increase. He talks about the concept of institutional completeness, which means that the bigger a linguistic group's network of institutions, the more pull its language exerts. We know that Montreal was the focal point of English Canadians' economic dominance for a long time. The Laurendeau-Dunton commission revealed that, of

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the 14 linguistic groups in Quebec in 1961, francophones ranked 12th for average income. Their average income was 51% of that of anglophones.

We have seen some progress with Bill 101, but there is still work to do because francophones' average income is still lower than anglophones'. We can see it, and it is very strange.

My regards to those opposition colleagues who are fellow members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We had to push very hard, but we finally passed a unanimous motion.

• (2215)

For the first time in 51 years, a study will be conducted on the French situation, the effects of the federal language policy and Bill 101. These really are factors that run contrary to one another. On top of that, this \$80 million is also being used to promote institutional bilingualism.

On the one hand, officials in Montreal are working to ensure that newcomers are integrated into the francophone community. It is normal for newcomers to want to head towards the majority, so they have a natural propensity to move towards the English side. Bill 101 sends a message that French is the common language and the language of work, in order to encourage these people to integrate.

On the other hand, the federal government funds the promotion of English in Quebec and tells these newcomers that French is not necessarily the official language that must be adopted and that they have the right to have services in the language of their choice.

In closing, I think that what is happening right now is very important. The fact that the federal government has recognized the decline of French sets a precedent, but it will take concrete action and much stronger measures than the simple knowledge of French as a prerequisite for citizenship or applying the law to institutions under federal jurisdiction. Otherwise, the government will simply demonstrate once again to Quebecers that the only way to ensure the future of the French language is through Quebec's independence.

• (2220)

Mr. René Arseneault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Chair, I salute my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île.

This evening, my colleagues from all parties have been quoting René Lévesque left and right. I remind my Quebec friends that René Lévesque was born where I am from, in Acadia, in northern New Brunswick, at the Restigouche Hospital Centre in Campbellton. However, I do not know whether that had a positive or negative influence on his career. Time will tell.

As an Acadian, I am well aware that my community unfortunately has a head start on Quebec when it comes to linguistic assimilation and the decline of the French fact, at least in our respective communities.

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I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the causes of the decline of French in Montreal, since that is what we are debating this evening. How does he think immigration is affecting Montreal and its ability to attract newcomers and head offices?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Chair, the problem is that newcomers make Montreal their home. The Charter of the French Language suffered so much erosion and we ended up with a type of integral bilingualism, by which newcomers have access to services in English, services at the municipal, provincial or especially the federal levels.

The federal government is constantly pushing for the services to be in English. People tell themselves that they are in Canada, where the majority speaks English, and they believe that they have the choice to be served in French or in English. There is no doubt that those who are more drawn to English tend to choose that language and we only manage to attract people who are already francophone.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Chair, I commend my colleague for his passion for the French language.

I also commend my colleague from Acadia who reminded us that René Lévesque was born in his neck of the woods.

Before I ask my question, I want to tell my colleague and the people watching us that I am pleased that this work is being done. There was a debate this evening, but the Standing Committee on Official Languages will focus on the decline of French in Quebec and across the country starting next week. I am pleased to have worked with the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois on this initiative. We will continue to work to advance linguistic duality in Canada.

The hon. member talked about the decline of French's appeal in Montreal. I would like him to explain to me how French can be made more attractive in order to maintain this duality at the heart of Canada's francophone engine.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Chair, the Government of Quebec has been promising for quite some time to strengthen Bill 101. That could help.

I want to point out to my colleague from Mount Royal that Bill 101 seeks to make French the common language. We did not want to do what English Canada did to francophones when it banned French institutions and education. We maintained English institutions for the historic anglophone community. However, those should be exceptions. Other than that, services should be offered everywhere in French. As a result, newcomers will need to learn French and integrate.

I found it very surprising that a unionist like the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie is saying that incentives are required but not legislative measures, such as requiring a knowledge of French. If newcomers do not think it is essential to speak French, then they will not be interested in French language training initiatives.

It takes both of these things. As with health and safety at work, if there is no incentive, almost nothing happens.

• (2225)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague.

He just set the stage for my question. First, I would like to correct certain facts. The federal court challenges program was originally used by francophone minorities throughout the federation to uphold their rights. I think it is very important to remind members of that.

I think it is too bad to hear my Bloc Québécois colleague say that immigrants are not interested in learning French. I am shocked by the statement he just made.

Both the Government of Quebec and the federal government have made it hard for new immigrants, especially those who do not yet have permanent status, to access free French classes. I believe that instead of imposing restrictive or punitive measures, especially towards refugees whom we need to take in because they are fleeing war zones and prejudice, we must do the opposite and improve access to French classes.

It is unbelievable coming from the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Chair, my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie is distorting what I said. The federal court challenges program has helped francophones outside Quebec. We have nothing against it. In Quebec, however, it was used to challenge Bill 101.

Some immigrants are interested in French classes, but several teachers who give these classes have noted that, for many, it is not as important because they believe it is more important to learn English to find a job in Montreal.

I fail to see anything coercive about this. Does my colleague believe that imposing the requirement to learn English is coercive? Right now, someone can come to Quebec, take their citizenship test in English only and obtain citizenship in Quebec. It is consistent with what is happening. Just because we are doing a good job, does not mean that we cannot do better.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, like my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, I am also rather surprised by what the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île said.

I would like to quote the 2016 Samson report, which states that the decrease in French integration in Quebec is not attributable to a lack of interest in the French language on the part of immigrants or a lack of dedication on the part of those helping immigrants to learn French but to a lack of resources for French integration.

The Canada-Quebec accord gives Quebec a lot of authority over French integration and the selection of immigrants, especially in the economic stream.

What does the member think about the Canada-Quebec accord, which gives Quebec a lot of authority over immigration?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Chair, the accord does not give Quebec a lot of authority.

Quebec has a certain amount of power to select economic immigrants, but it does not have any authority when it comes to refugees or people who immigrate under the family reunification program.

Furthermore, the federal government is currently putting most of its budget toward teaching English as a second language. There is a lot less money going to teaching French as a second language.

I think it is about 4%. I will check the exact numbers in the study that was just done.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Chair, I would like my colleague to clarify something for me.

I was surprised to hear in my esteemed colleague's speech that the official languages budget envelope was used exclusively by English-language organizations like the Quebec Community Groups Network, for example.

What impact does this have on the subject of this debate, namely the status of the French language in Montreal?

Should there not be a balance?

• (2230)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Chair, absolutely. As we know, the Official Languages Act was intended to strengthen English in Quebec and French outside Quebec. It was not enough, but at least some funding was allocated to that end. All the funding to promote institutional bilingualism, when Bill 101 was being established—not against individual bilingualism, but against institutional bilingualism—undermines the application of Bill 101. Frédéric Lacroix spoke of the federal government's undermining of Bill 101. If the government will not recognize this, if it will not recognize that the very principle of the Official Languages Act goes against Bill 101, we will not get very far.

We would definitely like to see concrete measures. The ones we are proposing are rather minor. It is not a good sign that the government does not support them. It gives the impression that the Liberals are making their statements out of political expediency. I hope it is more than that.

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Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): To be honest, Madam Chair, I am a little disappointed in the Bloc's narrative this evening.

It is too bad the Bloc Québécois leader contributed nothing substantive even though this is an extremely important debate. The member just said that newcomers to Quebec do not want to learn French, which is patently false. I have lived in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, in the Eastern Townships, in Montreal and in the Outaouais, and I have never met a newcomer to Quebec who did not want to learn French. The problem is a shortage of resources, courses and training. To top it off, the Government of Quebec recently cut access to French classes for refugees.

Can the member comment on the unavailability of French classes for newcomers to Quebec, a problem resulting, unfortunately, from decisions made by the Government of Quebec?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Chair, firstly, I did not say that all immigrants do not want to learn French. Many immigrants want to learn French, but there are also those who see that English is much more significant. They are in Canada, and they would rather learn English. The federal government mainly funds English as a second language teaching.

If there is one thing that should be changed, that is it. We have to stop—

The Deputy Chair: I am sorry, I allowed a bit more time and it is now 10:32 p.m.

It being 10:32 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53., the committee will rise.

(Government Business No. 2 reported)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:32 p.m.)

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