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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 1, 2021

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from November 25, 2020, consideration of the motion 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.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for those who may not know, the city of Joliette, for which my riding is named, was established after Barthélemy Joliette built a mill on the bank of the L'Assomption River. At that time, the city was named L'industrie, which clearly shows the importance of entrepreneurship for our regional county municipality and for the northern Lanaudière region.

I already knew that before I was elected in 2015, when my riding was booming both socially and economically. However, I have heard from many entrepreneurs about how difficult it is to transfer their business to their children, since it is less profitable than selling it to a stranger. That is unbelievable. The Bloc Québécois and I are obviously in favour of Bill C-208. We have been working on this issue for many years. In fact, my colleague from Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères introduced a similar bill in the previous Parliament.

If this bill were to pass, it would have a very significant impact on Quebec. Nearly one-third of Quebec's SMEs were buyouts, whereas that number is one-quarter for Canadian businesses. According to Marc Duhamel, a professor at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, the rate of business buyouts in rural areas is around 45%. Helping the next generation of business owners would be good for Quebec, and when something is good for Quebec, the Bloc Québécois votes in favour of it.

I also know that these changes will be good for my region. My riding has numerous farms in practically every one of its municipalities, including places like Saint-Thomas, Rawdon and Saint-Ambroise. We all know a farmer, and we are proud to support our local

producers in our farmers' markets, grocery stores and even the little stands we see on pretty much every major roadway.

Right now, the crux of the issue is that a business transferred to a family member is treated as a dividend, not a capital gain, unlike a business sold to someone at arm's length. People who want to sell their small or medium-sized business or their farm or fishing operation to their children are not entitled to the lifetime capital gains exemption, but if they sell to a third party, they are.

I get that the government wants to prevent potential fraud and tax avoidance, but this situation complicates the lives of everyone who genuinely wants to take over the family business. This is like asking people to slow down to 80 kilometres per hour because some people are speeding along at over 130 kilometres per hour. The government should fix this situation by allowing transfers to family members. If a transaction is fraudulent, the government can investigate it, kind of like how a police officer would ticket someone speeding on Highway 50, but would let everyone who obeys the speed limit carry on.

Speaking of tax avoidance, there are other much more concerning cases. Here are three examples the government should tackle. First, the government should immediately start taxing web giants doing business in Quebec and Canada. Second, web giants' digital services should be subject to GST. Quebec already collects QST from them. These two measures have been announced, but they should be implemented right away. Third, the government should shut down the tax haven loophole. That was my goal in 2016 with Motion No. 42.

This is a serious problem, and many people in my riding are suffering as a result. Year after year, I meet entrepreneurs who are looking for someone, the next generation, a young person, to take over the family business. Rather than taking examples from my own family, among my uncles, aunts and cousins, let me give an example that illustrates how ridiculous this situation is. I will tell you about Charles, who went to high school with my assistant.

Private Members' Business

I have met Charles a number of times since my first election campaign in 2015. Ever since he was old enough to work, Charles has been toiling in his family business, a great sound, multimedia and lighting services company, the kind you often see at festivals, fundraisers and community events in the Lanaudière region and beyond. Not too long ago, Charles and his business partner bought the company. However, the family member who owned the business would have been better off selling it only to the partner, who was already working for the business, rather than including his own son in the transaction. How is that right?

Another incongruity has to do with selling to a competitor, which would actually be more profitable than selling to the next generation, the ones who know the distributors, the customers, the activities and the local reality. This would reduce competition in the sector, possibly increase the price of services and cause the loss of local expertise.

• (1110)

Unlike many other businesses that have no choice but to close up shop because of tax regulations, that SME was able to keep running back home in Joliette. If I open my curtains, I can see it from my window. I could talk at length about the problems facing this industry and even more so now because of the wide-scale cancellation of activities. However, that is not what this bill is about.

I would point out that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the CFIB, would like to see this bill pass, which is only natural.

There are many reasons we need to keep these SMEs in the hands of the next generation. First, this would allow several regions to develop their industry. We need to fix this problem for all SMEs, but even more so for businesses in the fisheries and agricultural sectors. In Quebec and in the regions, fisheries and agriculture are among our biggest industries.

Things are looking rather bleak when it comes to the next generation taking the reins of SMEs in the future. Statistics show that in 2016, fewer than 25% of farms had secured a successor and that rate has remained the same since 2011.

Between 500 and 800 young farmers are taking over a farm each year, when in fact 1,000 are required to maintain the number of farms in Quebec. Roughly one farm a day is disappearing back home.

In the fisheries sector, there are three major obstacles to the acquisition of a business. Léa Richard, of the Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre des pêches maritimes, said the following:

...what is truly difficult for this next generation is access to financing, the transfer of licences and the administrative complexity. These are the three elements that make it difficult for the next generation to acquire a fishing business.

We know that it is already difficult to take over a business. It is that much more difficult in sectors that require a sizeable capital investment. For these people who have poured their heart and soul into their business, which most of the time represents their retirement nest egg, it seems unfair that it costs them an arm and a leg to sell their business to their children.

It is difficult for people to go into business and later to let go of what they have spent most of their life building. If we could at least make it easier for them to sell their business to a family member, that would be a good thing.

The government will probably remind us that we need to make choices and that this measure comes at a significant cost. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer reviewed a similar bill in 2017 and estimated the cost at about \$376 million. To put that in terms the Liberals will understand, that is equivalent to a little more than one-third of a contribution agreement with WE Charity, or about 40% more than the sole-source contract awarded to Frank Baylis.

This measure may be costly, but it is nothing considering how much the next generation could help business owners. Losing a business is hard on the owners, but the impact of that loss ripples beyond the owner and their loved ones. Suppliers, creditors, employees and customers lose an important partner. We often think about how the closure of a large company can have repercussions on a region, as was the case with Electrolux a few years ago in Assomption, near my riding. However, we rarely consider that the loss of multiple small businesses can have a less immediate but equally serious impact on the socio-economic fabric.

Ensuring the succession and continuity of SMEs is not only good for our economy and governments' fiscal capacity, but it is necessary for efficient land occupancy. From the North Shore to Abitibi, from Gaspé to Nunavik, Quebec has chosen to have vibrant regions, each with its own strengths, growth sectors and educational institutions, such as CEGEPs. According to Maripier Tremblay, an associate professor in the department of management in Université Laval's faculty of business administration, "Quebec's economy depends on its SMEs, but also on its regions. It is very important for businesses in the regions to retain their pools of workers."

I will close by saying that to have strong regions, we need to have people living there. For the period from 2014 to 2023, the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal estimates that between 79,000 and 140,000 jobs in our SMEs could be lost due to the entrepreneurial deficit. That is a gigantic number.

• (1115)

That is like one or two whole ridings of workers disappearing in 10 years. When many families leave a region, it has significant consequences for the entire ecosystem.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many in this country are away from their loved ones, so before I get started, I note that today is my oldest daughter's 21st birthday. She is on the other side of the country, but I wish Maddie a happy 21st birthday and give her lots of love from everyone here at home.

It is always an honour to rise on behalf of the federal NDP to fight for small business. We know that small business owners are the job creators. Right now they are creating 80% of all new jobs in our country. Bill C-208 is very important for supporting small businesses and local communities and for stopping the economic leakages from small communities in our country. These leakages often end up in the hands of large corporations because of flawed and broken tax rules that create a benefit for selling a business to those at arm's length versus a family member.

I want to thank the member for Brandon—Souris for reintroducing the bill, which shows that there is non-partisanship when it comes to supporting it. As members are well aware, the bill was first tabled as Bill C-274 by the former NDP finance critic and former member from Rimouski, Guy Caron. He fought hard, as the New Democrats continue to do, for small business.

I want to talk about what Bill C-208 would mean for small communities. We know that owners of small businesses, such as family farms and fishing businesses, as in the communities around where I live in coastal Canada, are often selling their businesses to family members. Specifically, the bill would give business owners the same rights they would normally get if they were selling to someone at arm's length. This is important, because nobody should be penalized for selling a family business to a family member, but it is happening now with the current taxation system. The bill is very important to us, and we are excited to be speaking in support of it given what it would mean to rural communities.

I cited the importance of small business for job creation. If people see a barrier to selling to someone at arm's length and will pay more tax, they will do everything they can to pay less tax. With the current structure, for example, if a person sold a family business worth \$1 million to a family member, they would end up paying a dividend tax rate of about \$350,000. However, if a person were to sell that same million-dollar business to a stranger, someone at arm's-length, they would end up saving \$306,000 of the tax they would have paid otherwise. It makes absolutely no sense.

We want to encourage people to keep businesses in the hands of family members and encourage intergenerational business ownership, because we know that it keeps money and profits in our communities. For example, in fishing, if a person were to sell a family fishing operation to someone in their family, they would keep the quota and the jobs in the family. However, if a family member had to pay more tax, they would be more likely to sell to an international company or large conglomerate, which would hoard fishing licences and then lease them out to fishers. The same applies to farmers. Profits then leave the community at the end of the day, which is a huge economic leakage. The money is leaving the community and leaving our country in many cases, and this needs to stop.

Mr. Caron's bill tabled in the last Parliament would have supported small businesses, farmers and fishers, but it was defeated by a margin of only 12 votes. It was voted on after the government misled Parliament. The government cited that the fiscal losses would be up to \$1.2 billion, but the PBO put the fiscal revenue shortfall between \$126 million and \$249 million. That is quite a gap. The Liberal government could have stated what it would have cost Canadians taxpayers to do the right thing to help support the sale of

Private Members' Business

intergenerational businesses by not making them pay more, but instead it said the loss would be an astronomical amount of money. In fact, the PBO's numbers were somewhere between 10% and 18% of what the government had initially cited, which is a big gap.

● (1120)

The cost of the economic leakage and its impact on small communities across our country, and on family members, is worth the price of what we are going to lose in the long run, as we see those profits leave our communities.

We are heading into a huge period of succession in our country. A lot of small business owners belong to an aging demographic. People want to sell their businesses to their family members and keep the ownership in the community, which I assume we want to encourage. We expect over \$50 billion in farm assets alone to change hands over the next 10 years, so we are heading into a huge period of succession. For farming alone it is critical that we fix this now, because we have lost 8,000 family farms in the last decade. We need to do everything we can to curb that trend because it is obviously not working for Canadians. Only half of those small business owners actually have a succession plan, while 76% of them are planning to retire over the next decade.

That is important for a lot of people who have developed and built businesses in their families. I had a business for many years. When I started it, I was not informed that if I were to sell my business to one of my three children, I would be penalized with a heavy tax bill. If I sold it to someone at arm's length, I would not have incurred that same tax. It makes absolutely no sense, but most Canadians do not know that this is the current situation.

This is something we need to remedy. I hope that the government will talk about the real numbers that the PBO shared. We saw some Liberal members support the opposition in the last Parliament, so I am hoping those Liberals who decided to vote with their government's misleading information will actually support the PBO and do the right thing to support their communities and small business owners, especially those family businesses that want to maintain intergenerational ownership. In rural communities such as Courtenay—Alberni, where a large part of our main street is made up of local or small businesses, this is a really important piece to our long-term survival. We want to encourage local ownership.

Private Members' Business

Again, this bill did not pass based on misinformation in the last Parliament. The Liberals continue to make excuses on this bill. They say they will relax the rule for tax avoidance, but we want it to be done carefully to avoid these difficulties and challenges of people avoiding tax rules. If the purchaser or family member retains the shares for five years, the Canada Revenue Agency's concern is that, in the absence of a specific provision, the shares would pass from one family to another. If that five-year provision were in place, it would make that impossible. We want to make sure that we take all the excuses away from the government and alleviate the concerns of taxpayers, so that there are provisions and a system in place to protect against flipping these businesses to avoid paying taxes. This is to keep them in the hands of small business owners.

According to a 2012 CIBC study, close to 30%, or 310,000, business owners were planning to exit ownership or transfer control of their businesses by 2017, in one year alone. We do not have the recent figures. That means that a lot of businesses are changing hands right now.

I want to talk about economic leakages, because we are seeing more businesses being sold and ending up in the hands of large conglomerates. We constantly see local ownership being reduced. This kind of taxation creates a threat to local communities. We want to invest in small communities, and this is a very good way to invest in families and small communities.

• (1125)

Returning to closing economic leakages, we need to do everything we can. This legislation is important, but we also need to make sure that the big banks pay their share, that we cap merchant fees and that we continue to take a holistic approach to supporting small businesses. This is a good bill and I hope the government will support it as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today in support of Bill C-208 introduced by my hon. colleague, the member for Brandon—Souris, to amend the Income Tax Act to facilitate the transfer of small businesses or family farms or fishing corporations.

We already knew how important this issue was when this bill was introduced for first reading in February 2020. Who would have thought that, barely a month later, COVID-19 would come along and drastically change the landscape for Canada's SMEs?

As an entrepreneur and representative of a region that consistently ranks as one of the most entrepreneurial areas in the country, I was very sad to see the latest survey that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, or CFIB, released last week, warning that 181,000 small business owners in Canada were considering closing their businesses. That means one in five businesses could close down, despite all the programs and billions of dollars spent by different levels of government and the support services we have provided in our respective ridings.

This is a frightening prospect, since 2.4 million jobs are at risk if the pandemic continues, which is why I want to reiterate how important it is that the government do whatever it takes to fix the vac-

cine supply problem. We cannot sit back and wait until 2022. After all, we are barely into 2021.

Workers in the tourism and cultural sector are very much on my mind. Last year was devastating for them. The federal government really needs to get creative with its vaccine strategy, and it needs to do it fast so we can at least hope for some degree of recovery for the sector this summer.

September is too late, and 2022 is even worse. Until very recently, small and medium-sized businesses were the backbone of our economy. They created more than 77% of all new jobs between 2002 and 2012. As a Conservative, I am very proud of the Harper government for creating an environment that helped SMEs grow by reducing the corporate tax rate from 22% to 15%, lowering the small business tax rate to 11%, and increasing the income limit for applying this tax rate from \$300,000 to \$500,000.

As a business owner who created nearly 30 printing and communications jobs in my region, I understand the importance of ensuring our tax system encourages entrepreneurship.

It is important to understand what motivates entrepreneurs to risk all of their savings and their financial security to set up or buy a new business. People go into business for a variety of reasons. Some are motivated by their passion, while others see a service gap in their community that needs to be filled. However, most people go into business to provide for their family, with the hope that, one day, their children will be able to take over the business and build a better future.

In my case, I intend to one day transfer my family business to my daughter, of whom I am obviously very proud. However, I was very surprised to learn that, under the existing Income Tax Act of Canada, it would be better for me to sell my business to a stranger than to a member of my own family. When a business is sold to a family member, the difference between the sale price and the original price of the business is considered a dividend and is taxable at 100%. However, if the sale is between two strangers, the difference is considered a capital gain, only half of which is taxed. What is more, in Canada, the lifetime capital gains exemption that normally applies to small and medium-sized businesses does not apply when the business is sold to a family member.

What message are we sending? Are we trying to discourage people from going to business? I am not the only one asking these questions. According to a 2012 CFIB study, approximately 310,000 business owners, or around 30%, planned to sell or transfer their business within five years. That figure jumped to around 550,000 within 10 years. The figure may have changed during the COVID-19 crisis, which makes passing Bill C-208 all the more urgent for the many family businesses whose future is at stake. It is already bad enough that so many businesses plan to hand their keys over to creditors during this economic crisis.

• (1130)

We must not allow the unfairness in the Income Tax Act to force so many small businesses to hand their keys over to the government. According to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, “Over \$50 billion in farm assets are set to change hands over the next 10 years.” That does not even include the more than 8,000 family farms that have already folded in the past 10 years. Just half of them had a succession plan. As the population ages, three in four farmers plan to retire in the next decade. We need to act quickly to fix this anomaly in the Income Tax Act to prepare for the demographic reality we are facing, in the agricultural sector especially.

That is why I support Bill C-208, introduced by my colleague from Brandon—Souris, and I urge the Liberals to do the same. I remind my colleagues that during the 42nd Parliament, we debated a similar bill that had been introduced by Guy Caron, the former member of Parliament for a riding next to mine. This is a unifying bill. This is not a left or right issue; it unites us all.

I would like to remind members that Bill C-274 received the support of the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, but was defeated by the Liberals, who had a majority at the time, because they heeded the advice of public servants rather than that of the people who elected them. Many organizations across Quebec support the bill. The Association des marchands dépanneurs et épiciers du Québec has spoken out against the current situation, and the Union des producteurs agricoles and the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal both indicated that they supported the bill.

This issue was also brought to my attention during the last campaign, in 2019, when I met with UPA producers in Cap-Saint-Ignace, which is in my riding. Last Friday, I received an email from Andre Harpe of Grain Growers of Canada asking us to support Bill C-208.

I want to point out that the agriculture sector is following the debate very closely today. As the saying goes, better late than never. If the Liberal Party really wants to back SMEs, it must support this bill and pass it quickly because Bill C-208 will ensure that all these family businesses will continue to operate and remain intact by facilitating their intergenerational transfer. If this does not happen, a Conservative government will have no problem ensuring that it does.

I would add that with the speeches my colleagues made ahead of me, I think it is clear that the Liberals have no choice but to move forward and support this bill. In any event, they are in a minority. We will move forward with this bill. Whatever it may cost to implement it, not doing so would cost even more, because the value and pride that comes from handing down a family business is priceless.

Private Members' Business

Considering that for the most part, all Canadian businesses started as family businesses, that they represent 90% of the Canadian economy, and that they are the backbone of Canadian entrepreneurship and businesses with fewer than 10 employees, it is essential that people be able to transfer these businesses to members of their own family without being penalized.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Brandon—Souris for bringing forward this bill. I know that private members' business can generate some good bills from throughout the House. A lot of people do not fully appreciate the amount of work that goes into private members' business, which one only knows if one has gone down that road. Just for taking the time to go through the process to bring this piece of legislation forward, and all the work that went into it, the member deserve a lot of credit.

I am pleased to take part in the debate today over this private member's bill, Bill C-208, which aims to facilitate the transfer of family businesses between family members. This is an admirable goal. Indeed, our government recognizes this important issue, as evidenced by the mandate given by the Prime Minister to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to work together on tax measures to facilitate the intergenerational transfer of farms.

Ensuring the sustainability of small businesses, family farms and fishing corporations is essential to our economy and to the communities these businesses serve. This has been underscored by their crucial role in supporting families and communities as we continue to fight against COVID-19.

Our government understands that this is a fact. From the onset of the pandemic, through Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan, we have introduced a range of supports for small business owners to help bridge them to the other side. Simply put, we have their backs, and this extends to helping family businesses thrive for generations to come.

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

Private Members' Business

Bill C-208 seeks to amend two of the Income Tax Act's most important and complex anti-avoidance rules. These rules deal with intercorporate dividends, share sales and circumstances in which the lifetime capital gains exemption is claimed. Any relieving changes to these sections of the act must be done cautiously and follow rigorous study and debate to avoid the unintentional creation of loopholes that would disproportionately benefit the wealthy, instead of protecting the middle class and those who are struggling to join it.

Section 84.1 of the act, in particular, is in place to apply anti-avoidance rules when, as appropriate, an individual sells shares of one corporation to another corporation that is linked to the individual, such as one of a family member. When the 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 the capital gain.

This prevents the individual from realizing the proceeds from the sale on the 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 contract sale. Without this rule, such sales between related parties could be used to convert what should be dividends of 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 certain shares of small businesses, family farms or fishing corporations from its application when being sold by an individual to another corporation that is owned by their adult child or grandchild. This change would allow the owner-operator of a family business to convert the dividends of the corporation into tax-free capital gains.

In order to better illustrate how this would work, I will use an example. Let us say Darryl and Emily own a potato farm in P.E.I., which has grown to be a major regional supplier. After decades of hard work, they are now planning their retirement and want to pass down their business to their two adult children, both of whom already own successful small businesses in the community.

By applying the proposed amendments in Bill C-208, Darryl and Emily would sell non-voting preferred shares from their farm corporation to the two corporations controlled by their children. In doing this, they could claim tax-free treatment of the resulting capital gain from the sale under the lifetime capital gains exemption in a manner that allows the sale to be financed by the sold corporation's own assets without relinquishing control of the farm corporation.

• (1140)

Darryl and Emily could then use this planning to convert their annual dividend income into tax-free capital gains as often as they want, up to an amount equal to their lifetime capital gains limit. In this case, each parent could reduce his or her income tax by up to about \$45,000 for each \$100,000 of business profits distributed.

It is important to note that there is currently nothing in the act to stop a parent from selling their shares of their family business directly to their child or grandchild on a tax-free basis by 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 in which one corporation owns a second corporation. Adopting the proposed changes to section 84.1 could open the door to new tax avoidance opportunities. This would unfairly benefit wealthy individuals instead of the middle class.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, I can no longer hear any interpretation.

The Deputy Speaker: It is working now. I thank the hon. member for her patience.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Bloc member for raising that point of order.

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.

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

Spouses, as well as parents and their children, are already eligible for this exemption because it is presumed they have shared economic interests. Although brothers and sisters cannot restructure their participation in a corporation on a tax-deferred basis under the related corporation's 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 fewer tax avoidance opportunities under it.

If the proposed amendments of 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. This would create new opportunities for tax avoidance.

In conclusion, these are important considerations to take into account when reviewing the merits of Bill C-208. Our government remains committed to working with family businesses, including farming and fishing businesses, to make it more efficient, or less difficult, to hand down their businesses to the next generation. However, we must exercise caution to not create loopholes and opportunities for the wealthy to use private corporations for tax avoidance purposes. This would dilute our base protection of anti-avoidance tax rules. Moreover, this would create a tax system that caters to the wealthy at the expense of the middle class.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today's debate is about Bill C-208, an act to amend the Income Tax Act with respect to the transfer of small business or family farm or fishing corporation. This is a very important issue, and I am concerned about the government's ongoing failure to take action on it. This problem comes back year after year, and it has still not been resolved.

In Quebec, one in three SMEs is a buyout. That means that one-third of Quebec's small businesses were existing businesses bought by someone else. That is a big deal, yet the government penalizes people who want to transfer their business to a family member. In 2018, it was estimated that 30,000 to 60,000 Quebec businesses would not find a buyer in the years to come, yet the government is actively penalizing people who want to buy out the family business. It would rather those businesses disappear or be sold to strangers. That is just great.

In the agricultural sector, Quebec is losing one farm a day. We know this, we talk about it and we speak out against it. The fishing sector is no different. Fifty years ago, fisheries were flourishing in the regions, but today, fishing villages are disappearing one after the other. This is sad, but it is partly due to inaction by this government and, obviously, governments before it.

During my previous term, from 2015 to 2019, I introduced Bill C-275 to address this issue by allowing family businesses to be transferred to members of the same family. I was made aware of this issue by some of my constituents, including Mr. Tremblay, from Armoires Tremblay in Saint-Mathieu-de-Belœil. Mr. Tremblay was in his 30s and his father owned a small, family-owned cabinetmaking business. His father wanted to retire and was waiting to sell his business to his children, in the hopes that one day the act would be amended and allow him to do so without being penalized.

Right now, the government assumes that people who sell their business to their children are fraudsters. It thinks that they will not set the price at fair market value, so it decided to tax the entire profit generated by the transaction. The problem is that a small company can quickly grow to be worth one, two or three million dollars, even if it does not employ a million people, but rather three, four, five, six or 20.

Private Members' Business

We cannot ask young people who want to take over from their parents to withdraw two million dollars from their bank account. Very few people in their twenties and thirties can withdraw one million dollars from their bank account. That is the problem. The government thinks that people who sell their business to their children are fraudsters because they will give them a better price.

That means that they will not be able to sell unless they sell to strangers. Businesses will have to close because there will be no one to take the reins. It is really frustrating to see how the government refuses to recognize and resolve this problem year after year.

Not so long ago, I was discussing this with an old school friend, Marc-André Daigneault. His parents have a company called Revêtement RJ. The same thing happened to him. His parents wanted to wait to sell their company in the hope that the rules would one day change. He is saddened by the fact that young people cannot take over their parents' companies because the government does not want to modernize and change the legislation.

At the time, I had tabled a bill that was similar to Bill C-208. The NDP found the bill so appealing that it decided to copy it, and the former NDP member for Rimouski, Guy Caron, tabled it himself. I would not want to take all the credit for the bill, because this is something the Bloc Québécois has been fighting for for 15 years. As early as 2005, a Bloc Québécois member introduced a bill seeking to address the problem of passing down family businesses from one generation to the next.

• (1150)

I am an accountant by training. In my university years, when I learned the tax rules and understood that people could not pass a business down to their children—well, it is possible but very disadvantageous from a tax perspective—I was really frustrated and could not get over it. All of my classmates and professors agreed with me. If we visited a tax school, an accounting office, a lawyer's office or any university and asked an accounting or tax professor what they thought of this, they would tell us that it makes absolutely no sense. Unfortunately, the government is digging in its heels and preventing family businesses from being passed down to the next generation.

In June 2015, however, the Liberal member for Bourassa introduced a bill concerning the passing down of family businesses. He said that it was his first bill and that it was extremely important. That was in June 2015. When the Liberals came to power in October 2015, just a few months later, they were suddenly against it. It seems that the Liberals promise all sorts of things when they are in the opposition but do not follow through when they get to power.

Private Members' Business

As my colleague from Rivière-du-Loup pointed out earlier, this is not a partisan approach. My Conservative colleague said he thinks transferring family businesses is important. I mentioned my NDP colleague earlier. I do not know the Green Party's position, but I know a lot of Liberals are not happy with their party's position and agree that it is ridiculous, so much so that the government now finds itself in an awkward position.

We have seen several economic updates and budgets since 2015. The government said it would tackle the problem and try to fix it. Now here we are in 2021, and it is still not fixed. The Bloc has been fighting for this since 2005. This is unacceptable.

There are solutions, however. The government is going to tell us that we would be opening up loopholes, but our tax law is full of loopholes. People use tax havens, and the government does not go after them, but it prevents the transfer of family businesses. How does that make any sense?

The government says that it is impossible, but we have tabled a number of bills to resolve the problem. In 2016, Quebec's Minister of Finance announced a solution to the problem in his budget. Since January 1, 2017, four years ago, Quebecers have been able to pass down their business to their children without a tax penalty, but the federal government is unable to do the same. We do not know why, but it cannot do it. I think that the problem is stubbornness more than anything else.

Let us examine this question more in depth. The capital gains deduction in 2021 is \$892,000. That means that you can sell a business you spent your entire life building without paying income tax on the first \$892,000. It is similar to the sale of a tax-exempt home.

We also know that people with small businesses often do not have an RRSP. They pay themselves dividends or a small salary, and they have just as much as they need to get by. I am thinking about the neighbourhood mechanic or your local farmer. Often, they do not have any money put aside because they put everything back into the business. When they come to retire, they are very happy to have the \$892,000, because retirement is expensive, and they need enough money to last the rest of their lives.

Unfortunately, the government does not allow them this \$892,000 if they sell their business to their children. Selling their business to a stranger gets them an \$892,000 deduction, but they have to pay tax on that amount if they sell to their children. Even worse, the tax payable on capital gains is normally half the amount. If they sell the business to their children, they have to pay income tax on the profit as if it were ordinary income or a dividend.

It boggles the mind that the government insists on voting against the bill when it is well aware of the problem, when we have been telling it for years, and when a number of bills have been tabled to resolve the situation. I try to understand, but I cannot. That is why I am very pleased that we have a minority government today and that, with the three opposition parties, we will be able to pass the bill.

• (1155)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: We have a few minutes left in Private Members' Business, which still leaves time for the hon. sponsor of the bill.

Resuming debate. Seeing none, I will now invite the hon. member for Brandon—Souris for his right of reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to be here in the House today. As I said on November 25, “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.” That is an extremely important part of private members' bills and it has been recognized by my Liberal colleague today, and I thank him for his comments as well. I will refer to that in a moment.

I want to thank my colleagues in the House for supporting this bill on small businesses and the idea making it fairer for people to sell their business to their own family members directly, as opposed to selling it to a complete stranger or a third party that they may not have any connection with.

The bill and the bipartisan support I have seen in the House are tremendously important. Here I want to congratulate my former colleague, the interim leader of the NDP, Mr. Guy Caron, for bringing this bill forward to start with and for the support of the Bloc, which a couple of speakers have pointed out here today, as well as in the first hour of the second reading of the bill on November 25.

This legislation impacts every corner of Canada. It impacts every one of us in the House, all 338 of us. We all have small businesses in our ridings and I want to refer to the words “small businesses”, as some of my colleagues who have spoken today have addressed the fact that this is for small businesses, not big businesses. There is a huge difference that I want to point out to my colleagues in the House, and they know that.

The bill refers to family operations in fishing, farming and other small businesses in Canada that have been built on the pride of ownership and the hard work that their families have done throughout Canada, and it in no way is trying to provide any kind of loopholes. In fact, the bill is very clear and has gone to great lengths, which Mr. Caron and I have studied, to make sure that its wording will not allow those types of situations. As I said, it would be pride of ownership for people to be able to build a small business into a larger business, but once they do that, the things we are talking about in this bill are not relevant to those businesses.

The outcome of the bill will have very little impact on the government, as my colleagues have pointed out today. It will have very little financial impact on the federal government, but a huge impact on the currency that is available through small businesses to every region of this country, particularly during this pandemic. All small businesses are struggling. It is not their fault, but they are struggling right now and the bill would go a long way toward helping all of them alleviate some of the stress and strain of being able to hand their business directly down to their own son, daughter, granddaughter or grandson. That is whom this applies to. It is very narrow in its scope in that way.

Orders of the Day

It is inherently unfair for small business persons to pay disproportionately higher taxes if they sell their operation to their own children than if they did to a complete and absolute stranger. We have referred to the difference between selling to their family as a dividend, or to a stranger as a capital gains exemption, which amounts to a difference of hundreds of thousands of dollars to small businesses.

In making this change, it will allow the next generation to become business owners and to be able to carry on those businesses and to keep jobs in their local areas. Moreover, the funds the younger generation provide to the older generation are generally used for retirement, because a lot of funds that are earned during the small business development are going into the business to keep it afloat and expanding so that they can have that pride of ownership for their families in the future.

I want to close by asking all members to support Bill C-208 to encourage small business development in our country.

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. As is customary in our hybrid sitting, if a member of a recognized party who is present in the chamber wishes to request either a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I now ask them to rise and indicate so to the Chair.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I ask for a recorded vote on my private member's bill, Bill C-208.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, pursuant to an order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 3, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[*Translation*]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 51(1), the following motion is now deemed to have been proposed:

That this House take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to approach this debate by clearly indicating that these are my personal opinions as a parliamentarian, someone who has sat for many hours in the chamber, both on opposition and government benches. I would like to share three points in particular.

First, we should never ever take our democracy for granted and that our Standing Orders, albeit boring to most, are our pillar to our democratic system. I truly believe this. However, the rules that we have today need to be modernized. For political entities, far too often rule changes are more about strategy. I want to bring forward some thoughts as a parliamentarian and highlight three changes I would like to see take place.

The first issue is on votes. Our current system of voting is insane and needs to be modernized. Rule changes should not be used to take away from what is perceived as or are real tools that opposition parties use in order to hold government accountable. However, nor should they be abused. My suggestions on this issue would for PROC to come up with a path that would see the issue dealt with respectfully, but should incorporate a few points. Examples of that would be to include no votes on Fridays or Monday mornings; consecutive voting without breaks is not healthy; electronic voting should be allowed; and there should be a provision that allows for stand-up votes. These are the issues on which PROC needs to come back to the House with some tangible recommendations.

My second issue is one that I really do take personally. I love debate in the chamber. It is important that as parliamentarians we feel comfortable in expressing what we would like to say on everything that comes to a vote in the House of Commons. It is one of the reasons I believe in a dual debating chamber. I am not 100% convinced that we need to have a dual chamber; I want to propose something that would not require a dual chamber, and it is very different. I would call them MP debate days. This would eliminate the need for a dual debating chamber. The purpose of these days would be to ensure that members of Parliament would have the ability to voice their opinions on all legislative matters, including private member legislation, where a vote is expected on the said bill. It would ensure that the right of a member of Parliament to be heard in the chamber is there and is very real.

These days should be considered as MP days for debate on any bill before the House that has been given second or third reading and not voted on yet. There would be no quorum or votes as it would be treated in the same fashion as adjournment debates. Members would decide what legislation they would like to debate, but they would need to inform the Speaker in advance.

For example, members would be able to speak on only one piece of legislation on any given MP debate day, unless no other MPs requested to speak and there still would be 10-minute speech slots available. These debates would take place twice a week. We need to understand they would be meant to ensure that members would be afforded the opportunity to address the legislation they want to address. Even though I suspect both days not to be fully utilized every week, the fact that they would be there would support the importance of the right of members to speak in the House of Commons on issues important to them and they believe are important for their constituents.

The two days would be slots.

Orders of the Day

• (1205)

On Wednesdays, there is debate from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. I realize that is the day caucuses meet, but if members really feel passionate about speaking to specific legislation, they can excuse themselves from caucus or have independent members speak. It does not have to be on the Wednesday.

This is the way it would work on a Wednesday.

Members would notify the Speaker's office on Monday prior to speaking. There would be 10-minute speeches, with a five-minute question and answer period, as long as there are no more than 19 speakers. If 20 or more register to speak, then the speeches would be five minutes in duration, with no questions or comments. The Speaker can recognize up to 110 members. Rotations of speakers would be at the call of the Speaker, with an expectation that government caucus members would be recognized at a minimum of one per hour. That gives us a sense of how many members would be able to speak on any legislation, private members' bills or government bills, it does not matter, on a Wednesday. As has been pointed out, caucuses meet on Wednesdays.

As for Fridays, many of my colleagues would argue that we should take Fridays off. When I say "colleagues", I am talking about members on both sides of the House. I would like the House to sit from nine o'clock in the morning until 6 p.m. every Friday. I do not have any problem with that. Again, members would have to notify the Speaker's office on the Wednesday prior to speaking that they have 10-minute speeches, with five minutes of questions and comments, as long as there were no more than 35 speakers. If 36 or more members register to speak, then the speeches would automatically be five minutes in duration, with no question or comment session.

The Speaker could then recognize up to 175 members. That is a majority of the House. Rotations of speakers would be at the call of the Speaker, again, with an expectation that a member of the government caucus would be recognized at a minimum of one per hour. All the legislation and budget documents must be afforded the opportunity to be before an MP on the day of debate, unless, of course, unanimous consent is given for it to pass through the House.

If we believe in the importance of debate and enabling members of Parliament to exercise their thoughts and opinions on anything before the House at second or third reading, this is the optimum way to do just that. As I said, on a Friday, 170-plus members could speak. Those in opposition or in favour of legislation could get their messages across in five minutes. Given how frequently I speak in the House, every speech I have given, some more challenging than others, could be said in five minutes by focusing on the important points in bills. I am hopeful that members will see the true value in ensuring that this is about members.

The third issue I want to highlight is legislative programming. The legislative program is already in place, and we need to recognize that, for such things as Private Members' Business. When a member puts forward a private member's bill, we know that after two hours of debate there will be a vote. What about opposition days? We know after one day of debate, there will be a vote. With respect to emergency and take-note debates, the legislative pro-

gramming is already there, but we have not modernized it to incorporate government legislation also.

I am sure if all of us were honest with each other, we would recognize that at times private members' bills are more substantive than government bills from the past. Programming of legislation really needs to take place. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs should look at ways to enable government legislation to be programmed, rules that would automatically apply to legislation in order for it to be qualified and placed in a program of eventual passage.

• (1210)

Opposition parties could be given the ability to take a limited number of those out of the program for a period of time. I know it works because this is something we put in place in the Manitoba legislature many years ago when I was in the House leadership in the Province of Manitoba. It can work, but we need to modernize.

I see my time has expired, so I leave my two pet peeves regarding unanimous consent and points of order for another day.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member said, I do not think this is a partisan issue; it is just ideas being laid before the House for the procedure and House affairs committee to consider.

One of the things he said is that the way we vote right now, and I think I am quoting him correctly, is "insane". What about considering things like moving from having five members stand in order to cause a vote to 12 members, which is the minimum number of members required to be recognized as a party in this House? It would reduce the number of votes when we agree, and we could carry more things by voice vote, which is something I have tried to convince members would be a better way of doing things. We could just carry on with the business of the House without having to force every issue as a vote. There are many private members' bills, and even government bills, for which a voice vote would be sufficient.

What does the member think of that idea?

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one has to understand why we want to see those votes occur, and that is what the procedure and House affairs committee, PROC, really needs to assess. For example, there is a lot of validity for someone to say they want a recorded vote on X, such as wanting to see the MP or party members literally stand in their place and vote. There is a lot of merit in retaining that, because it does have a great deal of value.

Orders of the Day

What does not have a lot of value is having 500 votes on the same bill and all the vote results are identical. Why do both occur? One is easily justified and another one might be a bit more challenged, but if we put the politics to the side and give a different lever, we might be able to overcome it. That is something PROC needs to figure out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke briefly about electronic voting. I personally find the way we vote to be rather absurd, especially how long it takes. Electronic voting would be just as secure and would save so much time. Perhaps this would allow for more debate in the House. Economically speaking, the three or so hours it takes 338 MPs to vote are extremely costly.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, when I think of electronic voting, it is not necessarily what we have today. It is more that we would have technology such that if a vote were called, a button right in front of members at their seats could be pushed. Then numbers would be instantly portrayed on a screen, or whatever it might be. Other jurisdictions have it. It is something we can do.

I also believe there is merit in looking at possible applications. I am thinking about MPs who come from areas of the country that make it very difficult to be in Ottawa. This type of voting might assist them. I would not rule that out.

It is really important, in terms of my thoughts on voting, that we not vote on Fridays, nor on Monday mornings. That will help individual MPs from all political parties.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the public tuning in, we are debating Standing Orders today, during a pandemic, because there is an obligation in the Standing Orders to have this debate within a short time period from the beginning of a new Parliament.

I want to come back to the member's identifying a number of issues that the procedure and House affairs committee would have to look at. Would the member agree with me that the procedure and House affairs committee should also look at the question of confidence?

In this minority Parliament, it has gone far beyond the normal practice of confidence being budgetary matters and a very clearly worded confidence motion. The government has given "confidence" a very fluid definition. It seems to have applied it in a number of different ways that I do not believe are appropriate.

Would the member agree with me that the procedure and House affairs committee should be looking into this question as well?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do believe there would be value in doing that.

However, the real value would be saying to the standing committee that perhaps when they examine the Standing Orders, there is an argument to be made that it be done in camera. The member has

been around for many years, as I have, and it is a question of how we achieve these rule changes and modernize.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be joining this debate. Just like the previous member, none of what I am about to say is my party's position, because we do not have one here. It is important that backbenchers be heard whether they are in the opposition parties or the government caucus. That is an important part of what we do.

I also believe all Standing Order changes should be agreed to unanimously. They should never be rammed through by either side. This has been done in past decades by both the Liberals and the Conservatives, but it does not breed harmony in the chamber. We should agree on the basics of the rules at least.

I think we can all agree that the rules exist to protect backbenchers especially. My first job as the caucus chair for my recognized party in the chamber is to represent the backbench when it comes to speaking with the leadership.

I have eight points I am going to make. I know the previous member from Winnipeg had three, but with a lot of sub-points. I am going to try to keep it brief and maybe get into it more in questions and answers.

We need to change debate in this chamber so it looks more like the United Kingdom, our mother Parliament, where members can cede their time to other members without having to include the Speaker in the debate. Members can cede their time to entertain a comment or question and then take the time back when they feel they have given sufficient time to another person.

Debate in this chamber has become stultified. I think that is the nicest term I can use with respect to what I see going on. Members come in and read their speeches, whether or not they have written them themselves. I know the Standing Orders say we should not be doing that, but I will be the first one to admit that in my first year here I did the same thing. I would write out my speech because I felt more comfortable. It was a crutch. One of the members from Saskatchewan who has been here much longer than I have said it is a crutch that we have to get rid of to really get into the debate. It forces us to read the legislation, understand the positions of other members and really engage in the debate. That was the original purpose of a chamber like this: to have meaningful debate.

Orders of the Day

If we solve that problem, then I believe Private Members' Business should be done the same way as government business is done. We should have a thorough debate instead of the mover of the motion having the first and last opportunities to speak to the bill and in between the other parties laying out their positions, if there are any, without a question-and-answer period. It has happened a few times that an assistant deputy speaker has forgotten about that rule and then there has been a bit of confusion in the House. It would just be easier if all debate were treated the same way.

Also, the time provided in the House for Private Members' Business should be doubled. It should not be limited to what it is now. The previous member mentioned that we should dedicate a day to it when members could speak to a private member's bill or a motion of their choice and contribute to the debate on it.

On our side, Private Members' Business is an opportunity for free votes. It always has been and always will be. That is the great part, because all of us have ideas that we work on that come from our constituents. That was the case with the disability tax credit and Rare Disease Day, which were both private members' bills I tabled in the last Parliament. Those ideas came from my constituents. They are not really partisan issues; rather, they allow for legislative cleanups or are in commemoration of a special day, so I think we should have more time for private members' bills.

Continuing on the subject of debate times, I think podiums should be removed from this chamber, except for leaders of the recognized parties and for the finance minister. Podiums allow us to use a crutch. I use them very briefly. I do not think they should be in the chamber. I understand the original purpose was for finance ministers to give their budget speech, which I admit is very important, and I fully accept that they have to go through their notes.

I used to work for the Alberta finance minister. It feels like many cons ago; I was counting, and it was about 13 years ago now. He had to use a podium because his speech was too big and he had notes he wanted to refer to and it was just impossible otherwise. I will admit to that. However, other members should not have that crutch given to them.

I also believe Adjournment Proceedings should be renamed and moved to the end of Question Period. All it has really become is an opportunity to dive deeper into the questions asked in question period. I know we have changed the way we do it now, since it is a bit more fluid and it is easier to get that opportunity to have a one-on-one, but it would be much better if we did it after question period and the turnaround time was faster. It would not take up a lot of time. It might be 10 minutes. That would provide an opportunity for members to do a follow-up on what was said in question period.

To be kind, today there are countless points of order and people trying to correct each other when engaging in debate. Sometimes there are good points of order with respect to tabling documents. It would be much better if we shortened it to an in-depth debate of 10 minutes between two members. Applications could be submitted through the Speaker or the clerks at the desk for a random draw. I do not know what the system should be; I leave it to PROC to decide the details.

• (1220)

As I mentioned, with regard to doubling the time for private member's bills, Monday or Friday would be the best days to get this done. We could adopt some of the process in the other place. That is another archaic tradition of this place: We do not mention the Senate literally. It is that "other place". There, the senators have an opportunity to legislate much faster than we do as representatives from our ridings. The best senators are the elected ones. I know it is very controversial, but my province elects its senators. Whether they are Conservatives, ISG members or members of the western Canadian Senators Group, that is really important. It gives them a mandate. They can legislate in about two to three weeks and bring a private bill before this chamber for debate, whereas the rest of us, whether we are government caucus members or in one of the opposition caucuses, have a random draw and some of us will never get an opportunity to debate.

My former leader's first opportunity to present a private member's bill happened in her very last term in the House, and she had been here over a decade. There should be a greater opportunity for members to legislate from the back benches. It forces us to do good work and to understand legislation, including the downsides and the pitfalls, and really engage with legislative counsel to write good private member's bills that meet the needs of our constituents. That is important.

I also think question period should be moved to an earlier time on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. For the government caucus and for cabinet ministers, having worked for one about 14 years ago, question period is currently in the middle of what I would consider the workday. If we were to move it to the morning, it would give sufficient time for cabinet ministers to prepare, for their staff to brief them and provide them with whatever information they need. For the rest of the day they could carry on with government business or private members' business. I do not think there is a great reason for us to keep it at 2:15 every single day.

Routine proceedings should be moved to earlier in the day on Mondays and Fridays, the way it is done on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That should be the first thing that we do.

Orders of the Day

Also, Standing Order 31 statements should be moved to Routine Proceedings, either at the front end or the back end. A similar process already exists in the United States Congress, where statements are made very early in the day during their routine proceedings. I do not see why S. O. 31s, as we call them here, have to be done right before question period, outside of giving everybody an opportunity to have lots of people in the background, which I do not think is the purpose. It should be about making a statement on behalf of our constituents, celebrating an anniversary or a great success somebody had, or giving condolences on behalf of our community when a prominent community member passes away.

The last point I want to make is about the family-friendly nature of the chamber. This has to do with electronic voting and other things. A member on the government caucus side also lost a child in the sitting of the last Parliament. I know the issue has been raised before that this place is not very family-friendly. The times are not, as we vote late into the evenings. During the last Parliament, I sent a letter to PROC with regard to pairing votes. I had asked my whip, and realized that there was an important vote coming up that my constituents really cared about. At the time, I was still in the process of grieving my daughter. It would be far better if members could decide for themselves whom to pair their votes with.

I see the member for Kingston and the Islands is here. I know he is a gentleman. I am sure that, if I paired a vote with him on a handshake, we would agree that we could pair our votes so that neither of us had to be in the chamber, knowing that we were voting in opposite ways. That is a practice in the United Kingdom chamber. I know there have been problems with broken pairs in the past, but the rule now is that the whips fill out one of the binders at the desk to count the paired votes.

Pairing votes would let us get around the issues of a family-friendly environment when a member has to be away from their community. It would also force us to get to know members on the opposite side. That is not done enough, let alone in our own caucuses, to build trust with another member and have a paired vote. That would obviate the need for things like electronic voting, distance voting and proxy voting and the times of the day when voting is held. Pairing of votes is a long-time tradition in the Westminster parliaments. It needs to be revived and hopefully we can build that trust.

I will yield the rest of my time. I appreciate this opportunity.

• (1225)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Calgary Shepard for his intervention. I always enjoy his thoughtfulness and the approach he takes to try to identify the problems we have.

His particular mention of the U.K. Parliament really caught my attention. The U.K. has a debating chamber separate from its main chamber. When we moved from the old Centre Block into the current debate chamber, the thought was that at some point we might have another debate chamber in the House. Now that we are going virtual, we have an opportunity to have virtual debate chambers created and give us more time for debate in the House on particular issues.

Would the hon. member comment on that? The PROC committee could look at having virtual debate chambers not constrained by needing physical seats in the House.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I oppose the idea of a second chamber until we fix the way debates are done. To have a second chamber where speeches are read and it is a stultified debate, under the standard format we have now, does not help anything. It does not achieve the goals of members debating either the details of legislation being presented by the government or a private member's bill or a motion. I oppose the idea of a virtual chamber to linger on afterward.

Everything has to be fit for a purpose. What purpose would it have? Is it just to fill time, or is it to achieve a common agreement on amendments or common agreement on what a bill would do? If it is just to fill time, there is no purpose in having a second chamber. We have this chamber ready to carry on that debate. Whether it is a quality debate is up to members to decide.

• (1230)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Calgary Shepard for this important dialogue we are having today. I appreciate that multiple members in the House have said very clearly this is not necessarily the position of their parties, but it is something they think about. Today, we are really discussing the fundamentals of how we do business. I want to thank everybody for participating in this conversation. I look forward to the continued work that will come out of this.

One of the concerns I have as an opposition member is that, often, opposition days are put on Wednesdays or even Fridays, which allows a lot less time for the opposition to bring forward ideas and have meaningful debate in the House. This should not happen. Opposition days should be given the time and rigour they are well due.

Does the member have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I agree. Often, our opposition supply days get put on a Wednesday as a form of punishment because of wrangling and negotiations among House leaders in this chamber. If, ahead of every session or return to Parliament, specified opposition supply days could be agreed upon at the very beginning, perhaps by standing orders, we could get around this problem. We could then schedule every supply day ahead of time and have it pre-arranged, as opposed to it being an ongoing negotiation to determine which days would be supply days.

I know the current system allows the government much more flexibility. I will admit, the government needs flexibility if it has emergency legislation that it must bring forward or must put to debate. That could be solved by standing orders. The member is correct.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with a lot of what the member said. I am curious if he has a position on the change in the role of the Speaker, back in the late 1980s or early 1990s, when the Speaker started taking on a list of who was speaking and in what order. Before that, members had to try to stand and catch the eye of the Speaker. My personal view is that it diminishes the quality of the debate if I know I can come in at 20 minutes after 10, give my speech and be back in my office for a meeting at 11.

Does the member have a position on whether the Chair or the Speaker should continue to have a list, rather than the way it used to be done?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I would never say you use some type of list. That would be against the Standing Orders. I do not know how you choose who speaks in the House, but catching your eye is the first difficulty of any member, especially new members who are much closer to you or to your sides. It would be a difficult task.

Adopting the United Kingdom's format where the Speaker, at the beginning of the debate on a bill or motion, checks how many members wish to participate and then takes those members as having the first right to participate, as long as they stay in the chamber, is a better way of accomplishing those goals. I would prefer for it to move toward that system.

It would also force members to get to know the Standing Orders, the rules of how we are supposed to work here, understand the issues they want to raise, and stay in the chamber and participate in a debate beyond just their House duty days, as we call them.

It varies. I see some members very often. Pre-pandemic, they would be in the chamber very often to participate in all debates. However, we have other members who have very specific issues that they care about personally or that are very important to their constituents. That would be a way to make sure those members have first opportunities.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to the issue of the various options available to the House for reviewing its procedures.

If I may, I would like to provide a bit of background. When I was training in the law, I went from one Code of Civil Procedure in my undergrad, to a new Code of Civil Procedure after I was called to the bar. In the interim, I had some difficulty understanding the point of procedure in a legal context. I realize that once you really get into the thick of it, it is easier to understand its purpose, and this reminds me the important role that procedure plays.

As its name suggests, the role of procedure is, on the one hand, to ensure that things proceed properly. That is really important. Procedure helps us adapt to changes and new realities. COVID-19 is a great example. Procedure is what allows us to be true to principles that are immutable. It is often said that procedure must be a servant of the law, not its master.

If it is true that, in a legal context, procedure must serve the principles of law and justice, then, in a parliamentary context, proce-

cedure must serve parliamentary values. Parliamentary procedure must highlight and reflect those values.

In Bosc and Gagnon's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, there is a good quote by John George Bourinot, an expert in parliamentary procedure and Clerk of the House of Commons from 1880 to 1902. I would like to read it. He said, and I quote:

The great principles that lie at the basis of English parliamentary law have... been always kept steadily in view by the Canadian legislatures; these are: To protect the minority and restrain the improvidence and tyranny of the majority, to secure the transaction of public business in a decent and orderly manner, to enable every member to express his opinions within those limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time, to give full opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken heedlessly and upon sudden impulse.

The COVID-19 crisis gave us the opportunity to revisit the values of the House. In the context of the discussions surrounding the creation of a virtual Parliament, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs had to look at the values we wanted to see respected in the implementation of a virtual Parliament. Among the main themes that emerged were transparency, member participation and accountability.

As a young parliamentarian, I do not claim to know everything about procedure. Similarly, when I was a student, I did not understand everything that was happening. However, I discussed this with some of my more experienced colleagues and we came up with seven ideas that would help to better reflect these values in Parliament.

The first proposal concerns the adjournment proceedings. The role of the adjournment proceedings is to allow a member to obtain a more satisfactory answer to a question asked during question period. The problem with the current format of adjournment proceedings is that they use somewhat the same format as that of oral question period. The participants are just given a little more time to assert their claims. On the one hand, we have a period consisting of four interventions of 35 seconds each. On the other, we have a period consisting of two interventions of four minutes each, followed by two interventions of one minute each. This does not permit us to hold an adversarial debate where we can delve into the details of the subject matter.

Instead we should have a form of more focused questioning, as is used in the courts. If we were to adopt a format somewhat like the one used during the meetings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic, we would have five minutes to ask a question and the person answering would have the same amount of time to respond. We would then have the opportunity to ask other questions. By alternating questions and answers, we would likely have less of a dialogue of the deaf, which tends to consist of prepared questions and also prepared answers. We could delve deeper into the subject matter and achieve the purpose of the adjournment proceedings, which is to get answers.

The second proposal concerns Private Members' Business. I think it would be a good idea to have a period of questions and comments after each intervention. Currently only the sponsor of the bill is entitled to a period of questions and comments. Subsequent debate helps us to see who is in favour of the bill, but since we cannot question them we are unable to improve the position of each speaker or make amendments in committee based on each position that is raised. We are also unable to know where members stand in the end because when we present a position we always present it in the best possible light. It is when we are asked questions that the full picture appears.

• (1235)

Still on the topic of the order of business, I would like to see every bill that does not reach second reading before prorogation get reintroduced in the House thereafter. For example, the Bloc Québécois had already announced and introduced the majority of its private members' bills in January, well before the COVID-19 pandemic. The House was prorogued in the summer and those bills were not addressed before September or October. A lot happened in the meantime, including a global pandemic. Some of those bills introduced in January may have benefited from a review, some could have been dropped and new, more current ones could have been debated. I suggest considering this possibility.

I will move on to secret ballots in the House. I understand the idea of using secret ballots to elect the Speaker, for example, because we want to preserve the credibility and uniqueness of that office. The voting process for electing the Speaker is more like the one used in general elections than the one we usually use in the House. However, for the sake of the transparency I was talking about earlier, I suggest that, when the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business designates a bill non-votable, leading to a secret ballot in the House, the result should at least be announced. I am not saying that the vote should be public, but it should be justified by announcing the proportion of members who accepted the bill's validity and votability.

I also have a suggestion about Fridays, which is one of my favourite days of the week but could use some reinventing. In Quebec's National Assembly, there are certain days when about an hour and a half is set aside for members to question a minister. This serves as a kind of a prolonged question period focusing on a specific minister, who could be chosen at the parliamentary leaders' meeting on Tuesday. That would give members of the House other than committee members access to the minister to ask questions about topical issues.

It would provide greater flexibility and require more accountability on the part of the ministers. We could simply revise the Friday schedule, for example, by starting the sitting with this ministerial question period between 9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. From 11 a.m. to noon would be oral question period, followed by the continuation of the ministerial question period from noon to 1:30 p.m., before returning to the normal schedule with private members' business from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. We could make up for the two lost hours by starting earlier on Monday and by adding more time at the end of one day of the week.

Orders of the Day

As for convening committees outside their regular meeting schedule, I would like to suggest that we require only four members to call a committee meeting. Also, there would have to be members from at least two recognized parties, which would prevent one party from taking the committee's schedule hostage and making calling a meeting a very partisan tool. If there were only two recognized parties in the House, my suggestion would have to be modified, but it would prevent one party from using it as a partisan tool.

Lastly, I suggest creating a "Wednesday motion" to be voted on but not debated. This motion would be halfway between a unanimous consent motion, which is dealt with quickly, and an opposition motion, which is debated for an entire day. Unlike a unanimous consent motion, the vote would require that each member take a position on the motion. That would also allow us to move more quickly, since we would not necessarily need a full day's debate, as we do with an opposition motion.

I am out of time. I thank the Chair for giving me the floor. I am ready for questions and comments from my colleagues.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague as I really did enjoy the five-minute question and comment period.

My question relates to women in politics. We have had to adjust very quickly during the pandemic, including doing things like remote voting and holding online committee meetings and even online question period. Does the member think that keeping some of the procedures we have put in place would help to encourage and enable more women to enter politics going forward?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, encouraging more women to join the House of Commons is about more than just voting. I think we have to look at the bigger picture. The Bloc Québécois had the novel idea of allowing members of its caucus with young children to sit only from Tuesday to Thursday. That allows them to spend more time in their riding, not to work in the riding, but to spend time with their children.

The renovation of Centre Block should include the addition of a much better family room so that people can work while keeping an eye on their children. That would be another incentive. I do not think we should limit ourselves to the issue of voting because there are many reasons that a person might not be able to vote. A snowstorm is one example.

Orders of the Day

Voting is an important parliamentary tool, but it is not the only one. I think that remote voting alone would not solve the problem. I think we need to look at this more broadly.

• (1245)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my colleague mentioned this, but there is still the matter of electronic votes. I think it would be a good idea to carry out a study to determine how much time each electronic vote would save us. I think it would be very advantageous. We would save time. We can spend more time debating this, but I wonder what my colleague thinks.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that we need to carry out a study to find out how much time we would save. We already know that a recorded vote in the House normally takes about eight minutes. When we use Zoom, the vote takes about 45 minutes. Using the application we are considering now, the vote would take no more than five minutes. That is a little less time than it takes for a recorded vote in the House. I do not think that the three minutes we would save justifies switching to the electronic voting application once the pandemic is over. In terms of efficiency, I think that it would not be worthwhile. In a non-pandemic context, it is important that members be present in the House to do their job.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member and I have had very interesting conversations at the PROC committee about what a virtual Parliament would like. It has been the responsibility of all members to look at how we will change and modify our behaviour during this pandemic. It has taken a lot of thought.

The member mentioned in her speech that the government had prorogued, which meant that a lot of work that had been done was stopped. Should prorogation be something we should also be looking at in terms of the Standing Orders, that is, the ability of a government to prorogue without any consultation with other parties? It really gives the government a lot of power. What are her thoughts on that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

This is something that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has looked at. I was pleased to hear Professor Daniel Turp, among others, speak about prorogation and its legality.

I would urge my colleague to listen to the House Leader of the Bloc Québécois and member for La Prairie, who will probably devote a large portion of his presentation this afternoon to the issue of prorogation.

I would not want to pre-empt my colleague, but I will say that we need better guidelines for prorogation, in order to avoid making it an exclusively partisan tool.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for those wondering why we are debating the Standing Orders in the midst of a pandemic, we have an obligation, according

to our own Standing Orders, to have this debate within a brief period after the start of a new Parliament. That is why this discussion is happening today.

I would remind people that everything we are talking about is referred to the procedure and House affairs committee of the House of Commons. That committee does the follow-up on revisions to the Standing Orders. I will be referencing the procedure and House affairs committee, but from here on I will be referring to it by its short name, PROC.

COVID has really shown that we can modernize our Standing Orders. Members will recall that from the date of Confederation we have had Standing Orders in place based on the supposition that a member of Parliament, for example, from my area of New Westminster in British Columbia, would be taking the train right across the country and staying in Ottawa throughout the parliamentary session, so that I would be here for that entire period.

Following the Second World War, we moved to Standing Orders that better reflected the ability of members of Parliament to go to and fro across the country through air travel. Now, through COVID, we have seen a modernization, albeit during a pandemic, showing that we can modernize in the digital age. I would like to start there, because the idea of having virtual votes and virtual committees as tools available to parliamentarians is something that PROC should be considering.

First is the reality of being in our constituencies, particularly if we come from the north or from British Columbia, which are farther away from Ottawa. I have been in that situation since I became a parliamentarian, travelling back and forth across the country for a vote. Travelling to Ottawa and back, I have a 20-hour round trip for what is a two-second action, standing in the House of Commons and voting. Virtual voting allows me to better serve my constituents, and it is something that PROC should look into.

Second, if we are trying to make a family-friendly Parliament, the reality, again, of a member of Parliament having to leave their children to come to Parliament for that two seconds of voting, as opposed to using the various tools that we have put into place during COVID, is something that PROC should look at.

Finally, there is the environmental cost and the implications for greenhouse gases of going back and forth across the country either for that two-second vote in the House of Commons or for committees. Numerous times over the course of the last few years, I have been called to Ottawa for committee hearings in majority governments that had been convened by the opposition members, and the majority of parliamentarians who belonged to the government side have shut down those committee meetings. That has resulted in a two-minute meeting and a 20-hour trip back and forth.

We need to have PROC look into the advisability of using these tools, for the environment, for family and for better service for our constituents. Also, the principle of deferred votes is something that we need to keep in mind. Hopefully PROC will study that important ramification, rather than all of us being in Ottawa for a vote that could come at any moment. Having a deferred voting schedule would make more sense.

I am not going to get into the issue of the confidence convention. I raised it with the member for Winnipeg North. I will not get into the issue of aligning our main estimates, for more transparency, with the budgetary process. These are things that my esteemed colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, and my colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford who is also very dedicated to parliamentary traditions, will be speaking to.

I want to go over five other areas where things could be improved in the Standing Orders. Again, these are all suggestions for PROC to study.

First, on accountability, a majority government not being able to change the Standing Orders is something that needs to be looked at.

Second, the issue of time allocation or closure needs a stricter framework so that it cannot be used so simply.

Third is the issue of prorogation and whether or not that respects parliamentary norms. Having it in the Standing Orders, of course, gives the Governor General more ability to accept, or not, a request for prorogation when it has been improperly formulated.

• (1250)

Then there is the issue of opposition days. My colleagues mentioned not having them on Wednesdays or Fridays, which the member for North Island—Powell River mentioned very eloquently a few moments ago.

Having more late show question periods was another issue. If we have virtual ability, of course sometimes ministers could participate as well. We could have more late shows as a follow-up to question period answers that are not sufficient or adequate.

Then there is the issue of take-note debates. We could potentially allocate them to recognized parties or have them triggered through petitions.

These are all things that would increase accountability, and hopefully PROC will be looking into them.

Then there is modernizing committees. Currently, we have a very laborious process around dissenting and complementary reports. They should be automatic for opposition parties, and all recognized parties should be able to table and speak briefly to them when they are tabled in the House of Commons.

We have a very complex process after an election with the steering committees and vice-chairs, and if there are allocations to all recognized parties, it eliminates what can be complex negotiations. As well, giving committees the ability to table bills after carefully studying something seems to be an interesting idea that PROC should more fully explore.

Orders of the Day

For question period, a number of my opposition colleagues have mentioned the ability to have more of a back-and-forth. We certainly see this in committee of the whole. This is a way of getting more information to the public. The model for committee of the whole, with the back-and-forth between members of the opposition and members of government, is something that should be explored. We could have it once a week or perhaps have a major modernization of question period as a whole.

Then there is the issue of Private Members' Business. We have a problem of logjam with the Senate. It means that often private members' legislation is passed and then just sits in the Senate. We need to find a way to expedite, through the Senate, legislation passed by democratically elected members of the House of Commons. We also need more time allocation for Private Members' Business in the House.

Of course, if we are using the virtual tools we have used during COVID, we can extend the hours of Parliament. If there is more flexibility around votes, obviously it could make a difference, as we could include more time for Private Members' Business. Private Members' Business should have a priority over Senate bills.

Currently, when a private member's bill is deemed non-votable and there is an appeal, the member of Parliament who brought forward the appeal loses their right to their private member's business if the appeal is not accepted by the House of Commons. This is something PROC should be exploring.

Finally, there is the issue of making the Order Paper easier to read. It tends to be very gummed up at the end of a parliamentary session.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

In short, we can modernize all the Standing Orders of the House so that we can use the tools that were implemented during the pandemic in order to be more helpful and responsive to our constituents, especially for those members who are outside the greater Ottawa area. This would also be respectful to members who have families and would be much kinder to the environment.

The whole issue of confidence is not something that the government should be allowed to define unilaterally. This study by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will be an opportunity to provide guidelines for matters of confidence and prorogation and all of these questions that are important whether we have a minority or a majority government.

I will be happy to answer my colleagues' questions and comments.

*Orders of the Day**[English]*

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciated my colleague's comments, especially with respect to the value of working in consensus on changes to the Standing Orders and the idea of expanding and having ministerial participation in late shows. I think that is very worthwhile.

I would like the member's comments on two points.

First of all, he spoke about committees meeting remotely. One of the concerns I have about committees meeting remotely is that it actually leads to a decline in the committees' autonomy, because right now they have to fit into limited predefined slots. I think it would be worthwhile for remote committees to continue to be masters of their domain and schedule as many meetings as they want, with extra meetings if they want, and have flexibility in setting their own schedules.

Also, the member spoke about remote voting. However, we would generally want to have a culture during normal times where members are in Ottawa when the House is sitting, so they could participate in debates. There would not be a need for long flights back and forth just for a vote if members were planning on being in Ottawa for debates taking place Monday to Thursday.

I would appreciate the member's comments on that.

• (1300)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's questions, which are important as always.

The first issue the member raised about committees is actually not an issue of the Standing Orders, but an issue of our technological ability within the administration of the House of Commons. Certainly, as far as the technology is concerned, we have seen significant progress over the course of the last few months and throughout the pandemic.

I agree with the member that committees need to be able to meet when they need to meet, and this is a technological issue that needs to be overcome. I think members of Parliament from all parties should be putting pressure and the resources in place so that the House of Commons administration can allow committees to do just that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the remark about requiring consensus to change the Standing Orders. I know that my Conservative colleague who spoke before me raised the same thing. However, it does the beg the question as to why, earlier in 2020, an opposition motion that came forward to change the Standing Orders to add opposition days, which was introduced by the Conservatives and supported by the NDP, was accepted by both these members. However, I digress.

With respect to the member's comment about a majority government not being able to change the Standing Orders, I am curious how we would bring forward a Standing Order to actually enforce that. Is that enforceable? Can we not just always waive that if we wanted to? I am asking what I think is a legitimate question: How do we bring in some kind of legislation that makes it enforceable?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, first off, the issue of the opposition day did not change the Standing Orders, so I would disagree with the member's first comment quite strenuously.

As to the further issue of changes to the Standing Orders, a number of us have raised this and are submitting it to the procedure and House affairs committee. It could potentially require some changes beyond the Standing Orders, but we should leave it in the hands of the procedure and House affairs committee to look into that important issue.

The reality is that one party, whether in a majority situation or not, should not be able to unilaterally change the Standing Orders. There can be some agreement on what a minimum consensus might require in order to do that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in the course of his speech, the member alluded to the various ways in which we modernized on the fly. We could not imagine a parliamentary system much more encrusted in tradition than our own, yet we leapt into what I might say is the 20th century, although we are in the 21st.

Does the hon. member believe at this point that we should have Standing Orders that are acceptable in a pandemic situation, somehow defined by all, that move into place right away so that we do not have what we went through? We have now invented a lot of ways to operate virtually. Should those be concretized as Standing Orders for us in situations like this but not otherwise?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is well aware that, tragically, we may be facing future pandemics because of the climate crisis. We have seen a number of indications that this pandemic may, sadly, not be the last unless we get a handle on the climate emergency, which requires real and effective intervention.

The member's suggestion makes some real sense. We could put in place a pandemic group of Standing Orders for what hopefully will not reoccur in the next few years, but could very well reoccur given a lot of the scientific information.

• (1305)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure for me to speak today on the Standing Orders. I would like to clarify that the views I will be expressing are my own. Everyone who knows me knows I like rules a lot. In fact, I volunteered to be on PROC because I really like rules. I am probably one of the very few MPs who have read the Standing Orders multiple times, as well as Bosc and Gagnon, but I digress.

I miss being in the chamber. I understand why we are not, but I am hopeful that eventually we will get back in the chamber. I am looking at my colleagues on the screen and in the chamber we are able to look at each other. We are able to gauge the reaction and give feedback. Unfortunately, we do not get those social cues on the screen.

Orders of the Day

One of the items we should look at is Standing Order 31. We say that they cannot be used for improper use, but we need to define “improper use”. In Bosc and Gagnon, there are references to personal attacks, using poetry, but these are all things that are unfortunately not being looked at in reality.

What is happening in the chamber during S. O. 31s is not necessarily what the intent of an S. O. 31 is. I would like to see those clarified because it seems to be an extension of question period where members are given a minute to basically say whatever they want to say and use that as their clip on social media. I would like to see that looked at in terms of defining it.

With respect to that, S. O. 18 refers to using disrespectful language toward other members. I am noticing an increase in disrespectful language and in tone, but I am also seeing that at committee when we are speaking to witnesses. I have seen some members actually berate witnesses. Witnesses are there on their own accord to give their testimony, but when the tone is to the point that I have to intervene as a chair, I think we need to take a look at that. We are responsible for our actions, and I understand parliamentary privilege may protect us, but we still do have a responsibility to treat people with dignity and respect.

One thing that drives me crazy, which I am sure my colleague from Winnipeg Centre was going to bring up, is the use of unanimous consent motions on a point of order. After almost every question period, we are seeing a member stand on a point of order and try to bring forward a unanimous consent motion, when we know that motions cannot be put forward on a point of order. I would like this practice to stop and for points of order to be used as they are intended. I think that is what we should be focusing on.

Another area I would like to bring up, and some of my colleagues have brought it up as well, is our virtual Parliament. What we cannot do directly, we should not be able to do indirectly. For instance, if we were in the chamber, we would not be allowed to be on the telephone. I am sitting here, looking at my zoom screen, and I am watching members speaking on the phone, which we would not normally be able to do. I think we should have respect for our colleagues and this institution. Being in the virtual chamber is the equivalent of being in the chamber. We need to be mindful of that.

I believe in the last Parliament my colleague from Brossard—Saint-Lambert brought up proper attire in the Standing Orders. I am going to read this because this is very telling for my fellow female MPs, but in chapter 11, on page 611, of Bosc and Gagnon, it very clearly says, “Current practice requires that male Members wear jackets, shirts and ties. Clerical collars have been allowed, although ascots and turtlenecks have been ruled inappropriate for male Members participating in debate” and that any “Member desiring...to speak at any point during the proceedings of the House must be wearing contemporary business attire.”

This is not just a House of men. There are 100 women members of Parliament, and I would like to see that we are reflected in the rules of order and decorum. We should define what suitable business attire is, because I do not think that stretch pants should be in the House of Commons, but that is just me.

Last, but not least, is something that is not in the Standing Orders. It is in the bylaws and policies with respect to the Parliament of Canada Act, the Board of Internal Economy and members' allowances and services.

• (1310)

I firmly believe that members of Parliament represent all of the citizens in their ridings. For instance, I was elected in Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine in 2015. I represent all 105,000 people in my riding. I do not have any indication of my party affiliation in my office. I do not put out any documentation with a party affiliation using parliamentary resources, so I do not feel that it is appropriate for parliamentarians to either be wearing masks with a party logo, sending out householders with the party logo or putting out advertising with a party logo using parliamentary resources. I know this was an issue in previous Parliaments, but I think it is something we need to look at adding to the Standing Orders, under codes of conduct.

I want any person who lives in my riding to feel free to come to my office and come and speak to me or get service. Regardless of how they voted, or if they voted, they are represented by me, and they should not have a big “L” facing them, because then they do not feel they are included. I have heard this since I was elected.

[*Translation*]

Some people who come to see me start by apologizing for not having voted Liberal. It is no big deal.

[*English*]

I do not care. I am here to serve them. That is what I do.

Therefore, I do not think that we should be allowed to use parliamentary resources to have the logos or the names of our political parties in our householders, advertising or parliamentary offices. I am the member of Parliament for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, *point final*.

I would like to see that included in the code of conduct and for the Board of Internal Economy look at that, because I am seeing more and more advertising with logos. I think it is inappropriate, and I do not think taxpayers should be paying for that. My point is that, if members would like to use their party logo, their EDA should pay for it, or it should be an expense during an election.

Last but not least is voting virtually. We are in unprecedented times. We have said this multiple times. I am sure someone has a bingo sheet and is now checking that phrase off. This is temporary, in my opinion. We cannot all be in the chamber for health reasons. One day we will be back. We will be in the chamber.

Orders of the Day

I enjoy standing in my position in the chamber to vote. I can understand that for this point in time we are in unprecedented times and that we need to be able to vote in a secure way, but also in a way that is expeditious. I just can imagine a 30-hour voting session on Zoom, and how that would look. While I understand that at this point we should be using virtual voting, I am looking forward to the day that we are back in the chamber all together debating and voting our conscience and voting as per the wishes of our constituents.

With that, I will cede my time. I welcome any questions.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Since hon. members have a lot of questions and comments in this debate, I encourage members to leave the parties' perspectives out of the debate, which is a little different.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from a nearby riding and thank her for his speech.

There is one procedural aspect that has really been bothering me since I was elected a year ago. I am talking about the questions that the government asks itself during question period. I find that completely ludicrous. Every question period, a Liberal backbencher asks a question to a Liberal minister. The Liberal minister then has the audacity to thank the member for their very pertinent question, even though we know very well that the minister wrote the question and the answer is scripted.

Ask anyone: journalists, mothers, fathers. Everyone knows that these questions are a way for the government to promote and congratulate itself. These questions have no place in question period. The government already has enough time to promote its legislation, ideas and opinions. Question period should be strictly limited to questions from opposition members. That is my opinion.

• (1315)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The government is allowed to ask three softball questions, if you will. I think it would be a good idea for backbenchers to be able to ask ministers their own questions. I agree with my colleague.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member pointed out the practice that has emerged where there are unanimous consent motions after every single question period, just like there are points of order. I wonder if she would perhaps agree to a system where we do what happens during adjournment debates, that we move to the end of question period to stop that practice right now.

I get the same amount of angst as many members do when I am trying to pay attention to what the latest unanimous consent motion is. Many of them should be done by private members' bills, private members' motions or as an opposition supply day. I am wondering whether the member would agree that perhaps a better system would be simply to have, at the end of question period, a prolonged adjournment proceeding, using the same system of four minutes and two minutes, to allow for more in-depth questioning of a minister and then carrying on with orders of the day.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, we are in agreement in terms of the use of points of order coming out of question period, when they are actually not points of order but unanimous consent motions, which can be addressed through other methods in the House, as the member indicated.

I am in agreement that if something should be brought forward, whether it be through a private member's bill or a private member's motion, it should be brought through that tool and not used as a point of order, because we are getting to the point that literally, after every question period, members stand up on points of order that are not points of order. As chair of a committee, it is pretty hard for me to then follow the rules and regulations and say something is not a point of order and a motion cannot be moved on a point of order when it is being done in the House.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the very beginning of COVID, during the COVID committee meetings, one of the things I really appreciated was the questioning back and forth and the time allotted for a member to ask a question and get a response. I thought that back-and-forth was very healthy and led to further debate. I am wondering if the member has any thoughts about how we could frame our question period to be a little more about meaningful debate and giving answers to our constituents and all Canadians.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question, and I agree. When working in a 35-second window, question period turns into these almost gotcha moments. I first heard something about this after being elected in 2015. In my first question period, members were screaming, and I was wondering what was going on. Then I was told it is theatre. There is nothing more disturbing than to hear that question period is theatre. It is a time to answer the questions that are on the minds of Canadians.

I agree that having an opportunity to go back and forth, get more in depth, and probe and question a little further is healthy, whereas right now question period has become theatre. It has become members wanting to get a clip to put on Facebook or on Twitter as their "aha" moment.

Unfortunately, it obviously impacts our capacity to work together for everything better for Canadians and to get some ideas back and forth on what a member would recommend and others thinking that is a great idea. That is what Canadians want, for us to work together. They do not want to hear us screaming and yelling at each other.

• (1320)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate. I will declare from the outset that I am not a procedural scholar or a particular expert in the Standing Orders, but I have some strong feelings about a number of ways that this place works. Also, as most other members have pointed out, my views are my own as well.

Orders of the Day

I want to talk a little about the Standing Orders in general and how they have served Canadians since long before Confederation. Some of our Standing Orders go right back to the Assembly House of Lower Canada, which is 230 years old. Dozens of our rules date back from those times. They are a part of how and why our democratic institutions are, in my opinion, extraordinarily successful.

Contained within our Constitution are promises of peace, order and good government. The success we have had in those areas is a function of how we govern ourselves in Parliament. Therefore, changes to the Standing Orders ought not to be taken lightly. I do not support a lot of the changes that have been discussed from time to time.

I certainly opposed the changes the government proposed in the spring of 2016. I do not support the idea of building in programming to bills either by PROC or giving the government the ability to do so. I am not going to talk about tinkering with the sitting calendar or the daily rubric, although I am intrigued by the member for Calgary Shepard's idea on moving question period to the start of the day.

Before I get to my main point about how we debate, I want to talk about the idea of any sort of permanence being added to remote voting or remote debating. I really oppose any type of permanence to these things for a variety of reasons.

I do not have time to really get into all of it, but there is something just inherently critical about being in close proximity to each other in the chamber, being able to gauge emotional response in debate, being together as we vote and bringing members into contact with each other. This is extremely important. Enormous factors will and can isolate colleagues from each other, without adding any type of permanence to remote voting. I do not believe remote voting can do a lot to promote a sense of family friendliness. Eliminating Fridays does not do it either. Yes, it makes travel a bit different, but condensing hours into the other days of the week would create different types of unfriendliness for the work environment and for families.

What I want to get into is how we debate and, if I have time at the end, a little on committees.

With respect to debates, this is a debating chamber and debate is perhaps the most important tool members have to represent their constituents. It is how opposition and governing party backbenchers can influence government. If Canadians watch, or if a member of the public were watching in the Gallery, they would see dull debate that is not particularly informative. The format we have of 10-minute speeches, which are usually read or at least done with significant notes just to put specific points on the record that are generally unsurprising and a regurgitation of known party positions and repeating that over and over again all day, is not the best way to have debate. It is really at the end of these 10-minute sessions, when we have five minutes of questions and comments, that the true debate begins. That is when members and their ideas are tested. It is really where members of the public, never mind other members of Parliament, are most likely to learn some insight into the member's position or to gain better knowledge of the bill.

• (1325)

The member for Calgary Shepard already talked today about the U.K. model. I certainly give tremendous support for the idea of moving in that direction. They have a long tradition of allowing other members to intervene during speeches. In the U.K. Parliament, it is perfectly normal for an MP, or several MPs, to rise while a member is speaking. It is the choice of members whether to yield to another member, and they can have time added back for when they yield for another intervention.

It even takes the Speaker out of it, where the member who has the time slot can manage who speaks. Members can make a speech in three or four minutes, making the main points they want to, and provoke response on the other side. They see other members rise to either rebut a point, to agree with a point or to bring in other information. That is when they really get the back and forth. In their Parliament, it is considered bad form not to yield one's time. Members would be heckled for failing to let other members jump into debate. They can have a seamless transition where there is much back and forth. I would like to see the Canadian Parliament look at how we do that.

Even if we did not go all out that way and adopt the U.K.'s system of interventions within a speech, if nothing else, we could perhaps change the proportion of speech versus questions and comments. Most members could imagine this more easily, to have a speech where they only have five minutes to make the canned points they want to get on the record and then have 10 minutes of questions and comments. This would be a simple change that would not fundamentally change how debate in our chamber is managed, as far as the Speaker and the House leaders go, but it would allow for much more participation and would have a much more edifying and engaged debate.

There are a lot of other ways we could improve debate. Question period itself could be changed to where questions are allotted or when the Speaker recognizes someone to ask a question the member is automatically given two questions, so the questions are always in two-question blocks. That way, the person who is asking the question can automatically then follow up with another question that is related to the response to the first question.

I want to say something about late shows. We could change late shows to go from a 10-minute slot to five minutes. Without even changing the rubric of the daily routine, we could go from three to five late shows, maybe putting that right after question period. That has been discussed today as maybe not a bad idea. At a minimum, we could open it up so maybe it is two, two, one and one rather than four, four, one and one and get more late shows in.

Orders of the Day

I do not know if I have time to talk much about committees, but I would ask PROC to look into or study the idea of having committee membership be determined by secret ballot. Rather than having whips supply lists of members for committees, have members actively campaign between their own caucus and other caucuses and be chosen for their subject matter expertise and their ability to work with others. The committee reports would carry more weight, they would be less partisan and they would be driven more toward strong reports that a government would be less able to easily ignore.

I wanted to touch on a lot of the things that have already come up today. We want the public to see that their MPs are able to engage in debate, are able to use their voices in Parliament, to be part of committees that are relevant and that produce reports that will have impact with the government. We can make all these changes, but I would not want to make large, whole-scale changes to the Standing Orders which have served Canadians well for centuries.

• (1330)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is specific to virtual voting, keeping in mind young families, those who may be going through a difficult situation in their lives or people who may be suffering from an illness. Other countries like Israel have had virtual voting, certainly for procedural matters, for a very long time. We now know this can happen in Canada in a relatively straightforward way. We have a virtual voting app likely to be online very soon.

What does the member think about implementing virtual voting on a more permanent basis, specific to either procedural votes or specific to situations, like my own, where I am the father of a four-year-old and a one-year-old?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, one of the tools that has already been debated today, which I felt strongly could have and should have been built into the COVID response, is a much more widespread use of vote pairing in case of a member who is ill or concerning travelling. I live far away from Ottawa, but I am close to an airport with a direct flight. I know for other members it takes a long time to get here. It should be much more acceptable or normal to pair votes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to these debates in the past and wonderful ideas and comments have come up that would help move us forward in a good way. Unfortunately, I have not seen us look seriously at adopting many of them.

I want to look at some of the comments on virtual voting. My colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby talked about serving his constituents. What many people might not realize is that during the 30 minutes when the bells are ringing, if I have something I really want to talk to a minister about, that is my chance for a one-on-one to address a really serious issue in the community. Sometimes people forget the importance of the ability to interact face to face and how something as simple as 30-minute bells before voting provide for that.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, that is a great comment. This is the chief reason why I am so opposed to the permanence of virtual voting. That unstructured time allows colleagues to interact in the

chamber, or in the lobbies, or across the aisle, or to catch another member on the way out from a vote. Voting in the chamber in person compels members to be in close proximity to each other. There is so much pressure to allow members to isolate themselves and be caught up in their own bubbles. It is invaluable to ensure that members be brought together in the chamber and voting is a way to ensure members are there together.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the pandemic there was a lot of rhetoric around having to get back to work with respect to being in the House of Commons, a push back against the hybrid sittings. For me, I was busy working. I have had a number of urgent matters to deal with in my riding during the pandemic. Being at home, in Winnipeg Centre, allowed me to get back to work with the people who I serve there.

Does the member see some value in keeping the hybrid approach to ensure we can truly be with our constituents and the people who elected us more than previously was allotted prior to the pandemic?

• (1335)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the member rightly raises the conflict between being available to one's constituents and being engaged in being a legislator in Ottawa, but the criticism around the COVID committee in that period was about the denial of so many of the available tools, not just to opposition MPs but to all MPs.

Constituents want members to have the tools available to them to hold the government to account and ensure that confidence in the government can be tested by Parliament. Yes, there is undoubtedly a balance to be had, and that is why we do not sit every week and why there are plenty of constituency weeks built into the calendar to provide normal functioning. The pre-COVID balance of the calendar was about right, and I would not support deviating from that or going ahead with permanent virtual operations.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as other members have said, I will be giving my own personal opinions. I have not talked to any member from any party about my ideas.

As a former chair of PROC, I think the results of this debate may depend on how PROC deals with it. PROC is a very busy committee. It has a lot of things to do, and there have been serious, major issues raised today that PROC just would not have time to get to. To deal with some of the major issues like electronic voting or a second chamber, I think PROC should consider creating subcommittees that could have other members, not just PROC members. Some of these issues may then actually be dealt with.

My major point today is one on which I have been pushing for years now, and I will take this opportunity to push it again. It is that when we return to the House, we should have electronic voting there. I am chair of the parliamentarians of the Arctic nations, and every one of the seven Arctic nations has electronic voting.

Orders of the Day

I do not think it serves people well when what now takes several hours for a few votes could be done in a couple of minutes. Millions and millions of dollars are being spent on this. I do not think workers in Canada appreciate it when millions and millions of dollars of their money are being spent just so that members can stand up before the results go in Hansard. That is where everyone finds out how we vote. The record is in Hansard. If there were a button on our desks, we could just push it. The results would show up on a screen, and then they would go into Hansard and everyone would know how we voted.

There is also the opportunity cost. Members are constantly saying they want more time to discuss important bills, yet we are taking hours upon hours in each session for people to stand up one at a time to vote.

For members who have questions about this, we could have trials. There could be certain votes that it would not apply to and for which members would still have to stand. We could do trial sessions, as has happened in the hybrid Parliament. As the Green Party member of Parliament for Saanich—Gulf Islands has said, I think we need to get into the 20th century, even, and make Parliament more efficient in that way. Perhaps the Library of Parliament could do a study, and maybe they already have, on how this is done around the world.

I would like to raise some other potential points. First, I do not think it makes sense to require unanimous consent to start the committees. Second, Sweden has votes only Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and that type of discipline would certainly free up a lot of members who have other urgent things to do and who may not be able to be in the House for votes or, as an NDP member said, be able to travel 20 hours for a 10-minute vote.

Another point is that PROC has dealt with electronic voting before and has said it was something that could be discussed in the future, as it did with the idea of a second chamber. The House of Commons in Britain and the House of Representatives in Australia both have a second chamber. That gives more MPs time to speak. We hear time and time again that more MPs would have liked to speak on a bill, as we heard again today. A second chamber would allow that, as it does in those other parliaments. This is great timing for PROC to do a study on that, because we have a second chamber being built in the Centre Block and we have this one in the West Block.

The other point is that in a pandemic or an emergency, such as damage to a House, we would be ready to go. That is another reason to do that as well.

As we have proven in the virtual Parliament, Friday sittings work very well. There is no reason Friday sittings and even Monday mornings could not be done by virtual Parliament. Sometimes in the past, because of my travel of 28 hours and eight airports every weekend, I would get home Saturday night, depending on delays and airplanes and everything, and have to leave eight hours later to get on four planes at 4:00 a.m. Sunday to get back here. Friday and Monday sittings are terribly inconvenient for my young family.

● (1340)

I once again go on record to say that I hope PROC reports on the Centre Block renovations. I have been pushing for a playground in the empty courtyard, particularly for women with children.

I do not think we should require a vote regarding the Standing Order that allows a member to be heard. There should be another process for that, because it is a good way for any party to waste time if it wants to.

What PROC or one of its subcommittees should discuss are the rules for pandemics and other emergencies that could occur, such as a fire. We need more detailed rules so that we can carry on regardless of what happens. Good examples would be a standing order related to social distancing during a pandemic or for a fire that requires movement to another building, such as a second House of Commons.

The points made about unanimous consent are very important. Sometimes we go through three reading stages, hours in committees, three votes, and then the same process in the Senate, to discuss major issues that are important to Canadians. They are given very thoughtful consideration throughout our system. There are a lot of protections to make sure this process is done right and is carefully thought out. However, someone can raise a motion for unanimous consent, and then we have 10 seconds to think about something major and make a decision on it. We have to look at how that could be made more efficient, relevant and appropriate.

I agree with what was mentioned today, I believe by an NDP House leader or former House leader, with respect to the order of the private members' draw. I too was in Parliament for well over a decade before my name was drawn for a private member's bill. One way that problem could be fixed is if the order could be carried over from one Parliament to the next for members who are re-elected. I know that solution has been proposed before.

Orders of the Day

Programming in general and the programming of government bills is a very good idea. It is done in many other houses. The opposition parties and the government sit down to decide how things would be discussed and for how long. If the Library of Parliament or a perceptive journalist were to do a study on how much time was spent on some very serious issues compared to some that could be dealt with very quickly, they would find that the time spent was not appropriate. That is because programming is not done. Programming would allow more time for things that have very serious consequences and are very important to Canadians. It would also provide for more orderly progress in the House and avoid the extensive delays that we see, which are not productive and which reduce the number of times a person can speak on very important matters they want to speak on.

There are a lot of things that PROC could discuss, but it is going to have to work out how it can do it because its plate is already full. It would have to set up committees or a process to be able to deal with some of these serious issues. There are so many of them that we need a process to deal with them all.

• (1345)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, going back to the last Parliament and the debates we had at PROC, my friend has heard me speak on these subjects for 10 hours at a time, so I am sure he will not mind an additional question.

He mentioned facilities on the Hill and recognizing the presence of young women with children. I want to observe that men also have children and that this is a live issue for young fathers as well. It is important to note that this is a balance that both male and female members of Parliament are often trying to strike.

Following up on his comments on the unanimous consent issue, it is interesting to me that members are speaking about the use of unanimous consent during this debate on the Standing Orders. All it would take is for one of those members to commit to consistently opposing all requests for unanimous consent and to say so. Of course, the member who did that would have to commit to saying no in every case, including in cases where the cause put forward through a unanimous consent motion was a popular one.

I am curious to know from the member if he is prepared to take that position—

The Deputy Speaker: We are going to have to go to the hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I think that if there were a way for people to have more time to deal with some of those very important motions, it would be helpful.

On electronic voting, I forgot to mention that three parties already, and I think probably four when they get to speak, will be supporting that. As far as the point the member made about men with young children goes, yes I have a nine-year-old and a twelve-year-old, but I did not want to bring up my situation.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think many of us agree that it would be useful to be able to vote electronically, particularly because it would be faster and would

cost taxpayers less. Electronic voting would allow us to vote faster in situations where we have to rise, something that takes at least 20 minutes.

Some of my colleagues rightly pointed out that, when we vote in the same place, we can go and talk to ministers and other colleagues. Does my colleague have a suggestion to address the lack of common space where we can speak to each other more freely?

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, we would not be decreasing the time that Parliament sits, but just be giving more time to more important input on important issues, as opposed to spending one, two or three hours just having people stand up and sit down when their votes are already recorded.

• (1350)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering about the use of parliamentary privilege for a member selecting to participate in person or virtually in either a debate or a vote and whether that is something PROC could give members of Parliament the freedom to choose, that is, whether they participate, versus having one system or another dictated to them.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I think that is a great idea for PROC to look at, and then PROC could make recommendations

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a person who lives on this side of the country, I appreciate the long trip it takes to get to Ottawa and how time-consuming that is for all of us over here.

My question is really about private members' business. I feel very strongly that we do not have enough time or opportunity to bring forward private members' business and for meaningful debate on it. It is important that all members have an opportunity to share ideas and for these to be debated.

The other thing that I am very concerned about is what happens when private members' business gets to the other place. Often there is obstruction and foot dragging. I think of the last Parliament and some of amazing private members' business that was done but then was just blocked. I think that is absolutely wrong. Does the member have any ideas of how we can make sure that those voices are heard and those private members' bills are passed through the Senate?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on the other place; they make their own rules.

Orders of the Day

However, the first point is a very good one, and I think it supports my point about looking at a second chamber of the House of Commons, because in a second chamber we could have more private members' bills and more debate, and more people could speak on government bills. That would be an excellent way of increasing the ability to have more meaningful debate, and more MPs could actually get a private member's bill forward.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this day is always a favourite of mine when we talk about what Parliament is and what Parliament could become by debating the rules that govern its operations. As we do so, let us keep our purpose squarely in mind. The rules should be so constructed not out of consideration for the comfort or well-being of members, but out of consideration for the common good of the nation we serve.

This debate today reminds us of how blessed we are to live in a country with long-standing and robust democratic institutions and traditions. I am thinking today about what the people of Burma have endured and are facing ahead, having struggled to achieve a partial democracy and now seeing even that very limited democracy knocked down by another military coup. Canada must engage swiftly in response to events in Burma. Some members will recall that I spent a great deal of time in this place in the last Parliament calling for sanctions against Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of the armed forces responsible for the Rohingya genocide. The House recognized that genocide, but the government failed to sanction many leading members of the armed forces, and today we see the result of that failure to hold people accountable for such serious crimes. Of course, many minority communities in Burma and Rohingya in particular were deeply disappointed by the role of Burma's democratic leadership during the genocide. Sadly, not all democratic politics is inclusive. I hope that when Burma's democratic leaders get their second chance with democracy, they will do more to counter violence against minorities and promote an inclusive concept of nationhood that includes the Rohingya and all other national minorities.

In terms of our Parliament, I would like to start by talking about question period, which of course is terrible and ridiculous. It is not because of the cacophony that normally accompanies it, but because of the superficial and insubstantial nature of the exchanges that often take place. Generally, the questions are better than the answers, but that has less to do with party and more to do with the fact that government ministers have very little incentive to substantially answer questions. Most poignantly in my own experience was December 11, 2019, when I asked the Prime Minister a question about Iran. The Prime Minister responded with a prepared statement about Iraq, which is, of course, a different country. One possible way to improve question period might be to replace the Prime Minister.

Proposals have been put forward for changes to the Standing Orders that would improve question period, such as a requirement that questions be given in advance and that time limits be removed or relaxed so that ministers could be prepared and have enough time to delve into topics in greater depth. I am a bit skeptical about how much of a difference these changes would make, since they would also make it easy for ministers to bore and obfuscate with pre-

planned precision. More time would create more opportunities for better responses, but it would not compel better responses. These ministers will not start answering questions unless and until the public holds them accountable for their failure to answer questions.

One simple rule for improvement might be to require that, in addition to oral responses, ministers provide written responses to every question asked in question period prior to the following day's question period, with no constraints on the length of written responses. This would be in addition to, not instead of, the existing process for written questions. This reform would still preserve the important verbal back and forth, but it would also provide ministers with an opportunity to provide more detailed policy information in response.

The biggest opportunity for question period reform is to promote the better use and increased prominence of late shows that provide the opportunity for a longer forum for back and forth on questions previously submitted, which is precisely what question period reformers want to see. Sadly, late shows virtually never feature the participation of ministers and sometimes involve the reading of pre-written responses by a parliamentary secretary not even responsible for the file. They also occur at the end of the day, when media have usually long ago filed their stories and gone home.

Social media is creating new opportunities for late shows to reach a wider audience, but I would also suggest that we adjust the scheduling of the day to have late shows immediately before or immediately after question period, and to require ministers to answer late slow questions on their own files. These modest reforms to question period and to late shows would provide more opportunity for substantive exchanges of ideas on policy issues.

One of the common complaints about question period is that it is too noisy. My contention is that, while not always done well, heckling has been a part of a tradition of this place for hundreds of years, and it should remain so. Some members have tried to suggest that it is impolite or even rude to interrupt a member while they are speaking, but what is polite or rude is entirely dependent on the cultural norms and traditions of an environment. It is rude to heckle a musician during a symphony. It is not rude to heckle a referee during a hockey game. It is generally good behaviour to avoid interrupting someone during a dinner party, but there are exceptions, such as if one has a particularly relevant point to interject. Clearly, an evaluation of what is and is not polite is dependent on an understanding of the norms and culture of a place, and heckling has always been a part of the culture of the House of Commons.

Statements by Members

● (1355)

There are a few reasons why heckling is not only a tradition but a good tradition. There are 338 members in this place, and only one of them can hold the floor at a time. Heckling is a mechanism by which members can be heard and speak and can represent the voices of their constituents in short, pointed and, hopefully, thoughtful ways, even when they do not have the floor. Heckling allows more voices to be heard more often and for the House to exercise its collective voice, making approving or disapproving noises in response to what is being said.

A concrete example of this is the way in which our Alberta and Saskatchewan caucuses, in particular, explode in angry noise when other members of the House promote a flagrant disregard for jobs in western Canada. The cacophony of objection is more than our noise. It is, rather, a genuine demonstration of the consternation that certain statements stir up among Canadians from those regions. This response allows their voices, the voices of Canadians, to be heard more frequently, even when their elected members do not have the floor.

Heckling also creates additional opportunities for back and forth among members. During question period, individual heckles are rarely heard. Heckling is best done during debate when the people speaking can sometimes hear and have time to respond and incorporate a response to that argument in their speech. The culture of Parliament has been and should be an interactive one, where members are listening to each other's speeches, interjecting and being responded to. These interjections can create a challenge for the person speaking, who, these days, is often simply trying to get through the task of reading a prepared text written by someone else. However, the fact that we at times resemble a read-out-loud club more than a Parliament is a debasement of this institution. We should once again start valuing the substantive and constant back and forth that would better serve the public interest.

Of course, heckling can and often is still done badly. Speakers should not be rendered inaudible by shouting, and heckling should be sincere and substantive, instead of boring and predictable, and so, by the way, should speeches. Sadly, the existing structures of the virtual Parliament further advance our degeneration into a reading club instead of a proper Parliament. Although some have made an honourable effort in this regard, there is currently no way to heckle virtually that honours the tradition of allowing thoughtful interjections that do not overwhelm the speaker.

Right now, anyone who heckles virtually comes through at the same register as the speaker and displaces his or her image from the video feed. That is obviously a problem, but it is likely a problem with a technological fix. I am sure that a House of Commons IT team could arrange a way for members to still heckle, whereby hecklers come through at a much lower register and without their videos showing. Absent that change—

● (1400)

The Deputy Speaker: I will interrupt the hon. member at that point, perhaps at a logical juncture in his remarks. He will have three minutes remaining for his remarks when the House next gets back to debate on the question and the usual time for questions and comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, people across Canada will celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week February 1-7, 2021, in the spirit of the October 10, 2010, United Nations resolution sponsored by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan.

The resolution calls for people to come together and learn about each other, which in today's environment is extremely important. Even as people must socially distance, technology has enabled Canadians to celebrate this week with enthusiasm, and this continues to grow. The events of 2021 are primarily virtual and subject to rules of assembly as cities across Canada come together in the spirit of the UN resolution.

I would like to recognize the tremendous work of the Toronto steering committee for launching and championing this week since 2013, and for its continuous dedication to harmony and peace.

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MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of bad heckling, the stats on mental health in Canada were concerning even before COVID-19. During these past 10 months, we have seen an alarming increase in the number of Canadians struggling with mental health, as well as an increase in substance abuse, overdoses and opioid-related deaths. This pandemic has left people isolated, anxious and uncertain of what the future holds.

Now more than ever, we need a national strategy to support mental health for Canadians. We need all levels of government, civil society and individual Canadians to come together to end stigma and increase the resources for mental health. There is help out there, whether it is through the Hope for Wellness Help Line, Kids Help Phone or family and friends. I would remind us to be kind to ourselves and to each other. It is okay to not feel okay all the time, and we are all in this together.

* * *

BULLYING

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 17, my community of Mission rallied behind Max. Max was bullied and abused at school. It was filmed by fellow students and posted online. It was a sad day for our community.

To help them recover, residents of Mission and friends from across B.C. rallied behind Max and their family. Hundreds of vehicles, horses and even a flyby by local pilots kicked off a parade to stand against bullying and to help this child heal. Participants decorated their cars, made supportive signs and left gifts for Max while following COVID-19 protocols.

I thank the entire Braich family, A.J. Gopinath, Clark “Griswold” Jahn, Leq’á:mel First Nation, Amy Greenhalgh, Councillor Ken Herar, Acting Mayor Jag Gill, the family and so many others who helped pull off this successful event.

I thank Mission for standing against violence and for supporting Max. I thank Max for their bravery. No person should ever have to face what they experienced. Today, on their behalf, in the people's House of Commons, I say no to bullying.

* * *

POLAND

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 10 marks the 81st anniversary of the first mass deportation of Polish citizens to Siberia and the Soviet Union during World War II. More than one million people were forcibly displaced. Many died from disease, starvation and the terrible conditions. Most never returned to their homeland.

Because of the pandemic, the Canadian Polish Club is unable to organize a commemoration event. A prominent community figure in Nepean, Ms. Alice Basarke, was born during the deportation. Her family escaped to refugee settlements in India and her father joined the Royal Air Force. After the war, her family immigrated to Canada.

Let us not forget about the tragedy of not only Alice's story, but of all the other survivors. It is a story of hardship and amazing resilience.

* * *

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

FRANÇOIS DUPÉRÉ

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Corporal François Dupéré passed away at the age of 40 on January 20. He enlisted in 1997 and served in the 4th Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment until his release in 2015.

Corporal Dupéré was a man of purpose and action. He was deployed to the former Yugoslavia and did two tours in Afghanistan. During his second mission to Afghanistan in 2011, he was the victim of a suicide bombing when out on patrol. After a long recovery, he rejoined his unit. Very few men can claim to be both a war hero and a life hero. Franck had an extraordinarily strong character and was incredibly resilient. He served as a role model for hundreds of soldiers and veterans across the country.

I want to express my deepest condolences to the members of the 4th Battalion and to Franck's family, relatives and friends, particularly his two children, Noémie and Anthony.

Statements by Members

Franck, you will live on forever in our memories. We miss you. Rest in peace, my friend. Lest we forget.

* * *

[*English*]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, my thoughts are with the people of Madawaska—Restigouche, and particularly for what we call “zone no. 4”.

[*Translation*]

Zone 4 became a red zone and went into lockdown over a week ago. Today I want to commend all the essential workers who continue to make our lives as normal as possible, despite the pandemic. I would also like to congratulate all the business leaders who are doing their best to cope in these difficult times.

[*English*]

For all our students, whether at school, college or university, who are seeing their lives turned upside down, thanks for hanging in there in the face of such adversity.

[*Translation*]

We admire the courage and resilience of our seniors, who can no longer see their loved ones in person. I want them to know that we love them dearly and, just as they do, we look forward to being able to hug them once again.

To everyone in Madawaska—Restigouche, let us stay the course. We will get through this together.

[*English*]

It is going to be okay.

* * *

GAMESTOP

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about GameStop. I am in no position to give people investment advice, whether to sell or hold the line, but what is clear is that this story turns the logic of the stock market on its head. People are making investment decisions that are motivated not by money, but by the desire to counter the perceived manipulative behaviour of hedge funds. Some of these risks will pay off and some will not, but these actions show an intuitive sense of justice as opposed to personal financial interests being at the heart of so much human decision-making, and thank goodness for that.

Statements by Members

I wonder if this will be a jumping-off point for more mass investor action in pursuit of justice: punishing companies that profit from slave labour, for example. This both disrupts and demonstrates the power of markets. While governments are often slow and ineffective when responding to issues of systemic injustice, and large institutions are bound to invest based solely on return, small investors can disrupt the system by bringing their values to the table. With this great power comes great responsibility.

* * *

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, working together and seeing government leadership at all levels matters, and it saves lives. Usually known for its challenging winters, last November, Manitoba led the country as the COVID hot spot of Canada. Our test positivity rate was higher than any other place per capita. The number of people catching the virus was at a high.

In the face of that reality, Manitobans banded together to find solutions. Together, we focused on the fundamentals. We wore masks, we listened to our health experts and community leaders, and we supported our vulnerable community members through one of the toughest times they have faced. Now we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Our case numbers have dropped and our major cities are coming back to life.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. Canada has secured solid commitments to vaccines, and every Canadian will have access to the vaccine, safely and for free, before the end of September.

* * *

SURREY ANTI-GANG FAMILY EMPOWERMENT

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, youth gang and gun violence has impacted my community in Surrey and the entire Lower Mainland for decades. Last week, I was able to meet with Brian Aasebo from the Surrey Anti-gang Family Empowerment program, a federally funded program that received \$7.5 million from Public Safety Canada in January 2019.

Brian was able to report the promising early benefits that this program is bringing to our community. In the 18 months it has been operating, SAFE, as it is called, has already provided support for 1,460 separate children and youth clients, and has supported over 269 parents and caregivers. The program also provided culturally sensitive support, such as counselling in one's preferred language, to over 243 clients.

This is amazing work, and I commend all of the SAFE partners for working to reduce the prevalence of youth gang violence in our community.

• (1410)

[Translation]

PHOTOGRAPHERS IN PORTNEUF—JACQUES-CARTIER

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take off my mask, which is from the Secret Valley in my riding.

I want to thank all the residents of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier who answered my call to take snapshots of beautiful places in our riding. We received a lot of photos. Some of them were published in an annual calendar featuring our very own treasures. I want to recognize the following photographers, whose pictures were published, and express my appreciation.

Many thanks to Sophie Moisan, Daniel Martel, Michel Roy, Michel Paré, Yvon Boisvert, Claude Huot, Alain Pichette, Sara Ponton, Pascal Cothet, Conrad Léveillé, William Cayer, Marie-Christine Genest, Luc Langlais, Mario Lucchesi, Geneviève Roger, Léo Denis Carpentier, Suzanne Claveau, Johanne Delisle, Michel Roy, Étienne Dusablon and Olga Maria Ramirez. In these tumultuous times, their photos have brought some light and some colour to the lives of everyone in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

I would like to thank all these amateur photographers.

* * *

ORLÉANS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this first day of February, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the start of Black History Month. I want to sincerely thank the Black community of Orléans for its community engagement and contributions to our culture.

I also want to draw our attention to the important role of women and girls in our communities. That is why every year I want to acknowledge the leadership they show in their volunteer activities through the Orléans leading women and girls recognition awards.

I would not be able to identify these exceptional women without the collaboration of the Orléans community. I therefore wish to thank the people of Orléans today for their dedication, passion and enthusiasm. Thanks to them, we live in an inclusive and respectful community.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month. It is an opportunity to highlight Black people's immense contribution to our country. Black Canadians have overcome great challenges. Some arrived as slaves before the practice was abolished in 1834, while others immigrated here to help found our great nation.

In the House, Progressive Conservative Lincoln Alexander led the way by becoming the first Black MP, federal minister and lieutenant governor. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney also appointed the first Black man to the Senate, Donald Oliver. They and many others have made a great deal of progress in the fight against discrimination and racism.

This month I invite everyone to remember the contributions of all Black pioneers to Canada. Let us continue the work.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks 26 years since the Neskantaga First Nation in my riding fell under a boil water advisory. Not only has the community had to overcome the advisory itself, but last year a malfunction with the water system caused residents to have to evacuate entirely.

The government has stated that no relationship is more important to it than its relationship with indigenous peoples; however, its inaction on this issue speaks far louder than its hollow words. All that community residents have been asking is for the government to keep the promise it made and put an end to this crisis.

Unfortunately, we have seen broken promises, finger pointing and endless excuses from the Liberals. It is time they finally take some responsibility and get to work. I am once again urging the government to ensure the right to clean drinking water for all Canadians.

* * *

HAMILTON BLACK HISTORY COUNCIL

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, I had the honour and privilege to join the Hamilton Black History Council in officially launching Black History Month in our community. The four pillars selected for this year's launch were empowerment, education, connection and celebration. We heard from Hamilton's first junior librarian and resident, Ainara, who, at 11, reminded us that empowerment comes both from our communities and from within ourselves. Dr. Gary Warner, a distinguished scholar and Order of Canada member, taught us about the importance of having role models in education. The Montague sisters shared their passion for building and maintaining deep connections within Hamilton's Black-owned businesses and Black-led organizations.

I was proud to be given the pillar of celebration, and I thank the event hosts, Terri and Corey, and all the incredible community volunteers and civic leaders of African-Canadian descent who work tirelessly to care for and support us through these difficult times. Our Black history in Canada continues to be written by us each and every day.

Statements by Members

• (1415)

[Translation]

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we mark the beginning of National Suicide Prevention Week, I invite everyone to demonstrate empathy and solidarity.

Anyone can be in distress, especially during a pandemic that forces all of us to make sacrifices. Our young people are going through a very turbulent time. This is tough on boys and men as well as girls, women and seniors.

Distress does not care how old we are. It could not care less about our profession or status. It affects single people as well as moms and dads, business people and farmers. No one is immune.

This is a special week, and on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to thank all organizations working to prevent suicide and help people who are suffering.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians' well-being is disintegrating under prolonged lockdown orders that just keep on coming. Yesterday, we read the heartbreaking news that there is a disturbing doubling trend of infants with head trauma and broken bones coming to hospitals across the country, indicating that parents and caregivers are struggling and need hope.

Many Canadians have pinned their hope on the speedy rollout of a vaccine, and who could blame them? The Prime Minister told us that was the key to opening. Now the vaccine rollout is failing badly, and we had been warning about this from the very start. It is like watching a car wreck in slow motion, as provinces see their promised doses go undelivered. With the combination of a deal gone back with China, a secretive vaccine task force and zero manufacturing rights negotiated for Canadian production, the September vaccination timeline is beginning to look like a pipe dream.

On this side of the House we have been fighting tirelessly to find actual solutions that could bring hope and help. Canadians can count on the Conservatives to secure health care, our economy and our future.

*Oral Questions***BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

Ms. Marci Ien (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the first day of Black History Month. Twenty-five years ago, the Hon. Jean Augustine introduced a motion that was carried unanimously by the House of Commons to recognize February as Black History Month in Canada. I am here, a Black female MP, because Dr. Augustine blazed a trail. However, her journey was not easy, and the challenges continue today. Social injustice, systemic racism and socio-economic inequality have scarred black communities. There is a call for justice and healing. Hate has no place.

This month is about honouring brilliant Black Canadians who contribute to every aspect of our country. It is also about looking forward. That means mentorship, opportunity and understanding, not just this month but every month. Let us celebrate, educate and advocate.

[Translation]

I wish everyone a happy Black History Month

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Line 5 pipeline, which feeds Ontario and Quebec, from the U.S. is vital to ensuring jobs in Canada and our energy security. It is essential for keeping thousands of jobs in both Quebec and Ontario, as well as literally keeping the lights and heat on in both of these provinces. It also provides all the jet fuel for Toronto's Pearson airport. Its importance to Canada cannot be overstated.

What is the Prime Minister doing to ensure that Line 5 is not cancelled?

• (1420)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take this issue very seriously. Line 5 is vital to our energy security. It supplies Imperial, Shell and Suncor's refineries in Sarnia. It supplies Suncor's refinery in Montreal and Valero's refinery in Lévis, Quebec. It delivers 66% of the crude oil consumed in Quebec. It also supplies propane to hundreds of thousands of homes in northern Michigan. Businesses and refineries in that state depend on it.

I can assure the House that we are looking at all of our options. Line 5 is a vital pipeline for Canada's energy security, and we support it.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not the Prime Minister, and that did not sound like a very comforting answer.

Line 5's survival is not an option. Canada's largest airport needs it. Farming and industrial sectors need it. Our economy, already suffering from the pandemic, cannot afford to shed any more jobs.

The Prime Minister has a choice: He can stand up for Line 5's continued safe existence, or allow thousands of jobs to disappear and leave millions of Canadians out in the cold and the dark.

When is he going to do his job and take real steps to ensure Line 5 and our economic future?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we take this issue very seriously. Line 5 is vital to our energy security. In defending Canada's interests with any country, we take a team Canada approach, just as we did very successfully with NAFTA.

On Line 5, these are improvements to modernize an existing piece of energy infrastructure. It is irresponsible and it serves no one to conflate that with other issues.

I can say that on this side of the House, we are working responsibly and diligently to support our oil and gas workers, keeping existing treaties in mind and protecting Canada's energy and industrial infrastructure.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that American policies are threatening Canadian jobs, and the Prime Minister, through three different presidents, has just shrugged his shoulders and let it happen. Whether it is softwood lumber, Keystone XL, Biden's "buy America" or now Line 5, the Prime Minister is failing to stand up for Canadian jobs. While he loves to blame the premiers for his failures, the fact is that it is his job to stand up for Canadian jobs.

When will the Prime Minister do something to stop the job losses that are coming as a direct result of these U.S. policies?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is irresponsible and it serves no one to conflate Line 5 with Keystone XL or any other project. President Biden's decision to rescind the permit for KXL has no impact on Enbridge's Line 5 or Line 3 replacement projects. These pipelines continue to operate. These are projects to modernize existing energy infrastructure that has been in place since 1953. They are driven by safety and driven by good labour jobs. Both of these projects have been repeatedly validated by the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***HEALTH**

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has now lost over 20,000 lives to COVID-19, but it is still in reaction mode. The border plan has been weak from the start. The provinces have no information about vaccination, and there has been no progress. Quebec is ready to vaccinate 250,000 people a week. Last week, we got zero doses, and we are getting very few this week.

How will Canada catch up and vaccinate the majority of Canadians by September?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as today is the first day of Black History Month in Canada, I would like to take a moment to recognize the outstanding achievements of the Black community in Canada and around the world and to remind the House that I, as procurement minister, remain committed to diversity in procurement, including by reaching out to the Black community.

In terms of the question being answered, I am pleased to say that we have vaccines en route to Canada and being deployed across the country on Monday and Tuesday of this week. We will continue to bring vaccines into the country to meet our quarterly target of six million vaccines, then in Q2, 20 million approved vaccines and—

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

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government keeps singing the same tune. It keeps telling us everything is fine. The fact is that Moderna announced on Friday that it would be delivering fewer doses than planned. The European Union is going to restrict exports. Canada's vaccination deployment rate compared to other countries is declining rapidly. Seniors are waiting. Front-line workers are waiting. Vulnerable people are waiting. They are the ones paying the price.

When will the government supply the provinces with the doses they need to stay on track?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear with Canadians as their concerns are completely valid. There is no situation more pressing for our government than ensuring that all Canadians have access to vaccines against COVID-19. The production of these vaccines remains in early stages and as factories ramp up their production lines, so too will our government be always prepared for the receipt of vaccinations in the country.

Canada remains on track to ensure that we have vaccines in the country for every Canadian who chooses to be vaccinated by the end of September 2021. There is no issue more pressing for our government at this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is one failure after another with the vaccine supply. Last week we received zero doses. We found out that Pfizer is reducing its doses by 80% for the first two weeks of February. We found out that Moderna is reducing its supply by 20% for the next few weeks. It is a disaster. Last week, the Prime Minister stood up in the House and said that everything was fine. It is troubling to see the government unable to ensure a smooth vaccine rollout and the growing number of dismal failures on this file.

When will we get guarantees that vaccination is going to happen in Quebec and Canada?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we share the concern of all Canadians to ensure that vaccines come into the country. That is why we are pleased to announce that the Pfizer vaccines destined for Canada are, indeed, en route and will be deployed across the country during the course of this week.

From here on in our vaccine receipts will continue to ramp up so we can ensure that all Canadians who wish to be vaccinated are so prior to the end of September. This is new technology, these are new times for the industrial world relating to vaccines and we must all ensure we remain vigilant while vaccines are being produced—

The Speaker: The hon. member for La Prairie.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listen to the answers and I am not reassured.

While the government says that vaccination is going well, Quebec has nothing. While the government says that it is going well, we find out in the British magazine *The Economist* that vaccination will not be completed until summer 2022, more than nine months later than the government's target. That is nine months late.

While the government tells us that it is going well, experts overseas look at Canada and say that it is not going well at all.

What guarantee do we have that vaccination will happen by September as planned?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we share Canadians' sense of urgency around securing access to these essential vaccines as quickly as possible. Our government is operating with this sense of urgency every single day.

More than 1.1 million vaccines have been distributed across the country to date. With just the approved vaccines, Canada is on track to receive six million doses by the end of March, 20 million doses between April and June and over 70 million doses by the end of September. That is our priority.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families have sacrificed so much during this pandemic. They have stopped seeing their loved ones, even when they live in the same city. The Prime Minister also has to do his part.

Oral Questions

It is still possible to take non-essential flights in Canada. Other countries, like New Zealand and Australia, have stopped all non-essential flights.

Why does the Prime Minister not stop non-essential flights in Canada?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since March of 2020, we have been asking Canadians to not travel during the pandemic. Last week, we announced additional rules on international travel. These are now among the strictest in the world.

We have reached an agreement with airlines to suspend all flights to Mexico and the Caribbean until April 30. Additionally, all travellers will soon have to book three nights at a public health-approved quarantine facility upon their return and get tested upon arrival.

The health of Canadians will always come first.

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members, whether they are asking or answering questions, to please ensure their camera is on and to ensure their microphone is muted while not speaking.

The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families have had to sacrifice so much during this pandemic. Many families have not even seen their loved ones living in the same city. The Prime Minister has to do his part as well.

It is still possible to take non-essential flights in Canada, while other countries like New Zealand and Australia have stopped all non-essential travel. Why has the Prime Minister not put in place similar measures in Canada to stop all non-essential air travel?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, our current rules are among the strictest in the world. We have been calling on all Canadians to avoid non-essential travel. We have reached an agreement with the airlines to suspend all flights that are heading toward the most popular vacation destinations. We now have, on top of the measures we implemented earlier in the year, new measures that will require all arrivals to be tested and to be quarantined at a designated facility.

The health of Canadians is our priority and we will do whatever it takes to protect Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a year after telling Canadians that border controls did not stop the spread of COVID, the virus is now rampant across Canada. Documents show that the Liberals stalled on imposing travel restrictions at the start of the first wave and again at the beginning of the second wave when doing so would have saved lives. The Liberals could have put in place a system of rapid testing at airports months ago, but refused this science-based approach.

Canada is two million doses short of vaccines this week. Will those who are vaccinated be exempt from the Liberals' too-late travel restrictions?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, Canada today has one of the strictest rules in the world for discretionary travel. A year ago we called on all Canadians to avoid non-essential travel. We implemented new measures earlier in the year to ensure that all travellers were tested prior to boarding the plane. Now we are implementing new measures. We still do not have information about the effect of the vaccine on transmissibility, therefore all Canadians will be subjected to these measures.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now the Liberals are saying that even being vaccinated does not guarantee an end to restrictions.

Canadians have stayed at home, they have washed their hands, they have worn masks and they have sacrificed a lot. With rapid tests and vaccinations available to the world but not to us, Canadians should not have to accept more restrictions without a clear end in sight and without that type of a word salad from the minister.

How many Canadians will have to be vaccinated before travel restrictions are eased?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of vaccination and travel is a live one. I met with my G7 counterparts last week to talk about standardization of international travel.

My colleague is correct. We know that vaccination saves lives. The science is still unclear, yet, about what effect it has on transmission. That science is evolving. We will be sharing the understandings and knowledge of vaccination as it becomes clear with Canada and the world.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 29, the European Union announced a transparency and authorization mechanism for exports of the COVID-19 vaccine from Europe. The minister knows very well that those measures could be used to block the delivery of vaccines to Canada. Nearly 120 countries have been exempted from these measures, but guess what? Canada is not one of them, despite this government's claims that we will not be affected.

Can the minister resist the urge to repeat her talking points and tell us whether vaccine deliveries will be blocked, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been assured that vaccine deliveries will not be disrupted by these new European Union measures. This is what the President of the European Commission told the Prime Minister and what ministers heard from their European counterparts over the weekend.

Our government's top priority is to ensure that every Canadian who wants to will get vaccinated by September.

• (1435)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand what the parliamentary secretary is saying, but facts are facts. Europe is trying to block exports, and Canada is not listed as one of the 120 exempted countries. If the Prime Minister spoke to the President of the European Commission, did he ask her to put Canada on the list of exempted countries, yes or no?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, clearly there is fierce and intense global competition for the vaccines, but that is something we always expected. This is why Canada signed contracts for vaccines with no fewer than seven different suppliers. In our conversations with the Vice-President of the European Commission, we made it clear that we expect our contracts to be fulfilled, and the Minister of International Trade was assured by his counterpart that Canada's vaccine deliveries would not be affected by these new measures.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday the European Union announced export controls on COVID-19 vaccines. Considering that almost all of our vaccines are produced or shipped from the EU, this could have a significant impact.

Despite claims from the Prime Minister and the trade minister that Canadians would not be affected by these measures, we are not listed on the EU's list as one of the over 100 countries that are exempt. Why?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague heard directly from the minister earlier today at committee, we have been reassured that vaccine shipments will not be interrupted by these new export measures. That is the message the Prime Minister himself received from the President of the European Commission and the message that various ministers across government have received from their EU counterparts over the course of this last weekend.

Our government's priority remains getting vaccines to Canadians by September, and we will deliver.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the point is that we are still not on the exemption list.

On another issue, we have learned that Belgium, where Canada's Pfizer vaccines are produced and shipped from, is looking at its own export controls. When I asked the minister about this earlier

today, she could not provide any concrete assurances that Canada would not be affected by Belgium's draft law.

What is the minister doing to get ahead of these potential measures that could affect the timelines for Canadians being vaccinated?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague is well aware, the minister had conversations with her counterpart in Belgium and received reassurances that our shipments would not be affected by these new EU measures.

Let me just say there is intense global competition for vaccines across countries, and we always knew there would be. That is why Canada secured no less than seven different vaccine suppliers. We will continue to deliver vaccines for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite the government's announcement, nothing is grounding non-essential flights during the pandemic. The only thing that has changed is that those who wish to travel south must now buy a ticket from a U.S. airline, such as Delta, rather than from a Canadian company. Foreign airlines continue to offer discount vacations. It is all very well and good to test travellers when they return to Canada, but does the minister not think that the best way to prevent the spread is for people not to leave on vacation at all?

Why not simply prohibit all non-essential flights, no matter the airline?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada already had the strictest measures in the world. We tightened them this week through agreements with SunWing, Air Canada, WestJet and Air Transat to stop flights to Mexico and the Caribbean. When they return, people must take a test before leaving and another on arrival, isolate in a hotel for three days and pay \$2,000.

We are convinced that these are very tough measures and, more importantly, we are telling all Canadians not to leave if they wish to avoid problems upon returning.

• (1440)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the government House leader believed what he was saying.

Oral Questions

The government finally took action, but it did not solve the problem. The problem is that there are people heading south on vacation. Today, under the new conditions, they can still go south. The only difference is that they have to use a U.S. airline instead of a Canadian one. That does not work.

What is happening is that people here, Quebec's aviation workers, are being put out of work while the Americans scoop up 100% of the profits.

Instead of undermining our industry, when will the government fix the problem and ban non-essential flights?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the thing that does not work is the Bloc's position. The Bloc is constantly looking for ways to criticize the government.

We have truly responded to the demands. The Government of Quebec is satisfied with the measures we have taken, and those measures are among the strictest in the world.

Again, our message for Canadians is quite simple: if they do not want to run into problems when they return, they should not leave in the first place. If they do not want to risk infecting anyone when they get back, they should not leave, period.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader is claiming that the government has responded to the Bloc's demands, but that is false. The Bloc called for a ban on all non-essential flights that are still available, since people can still head south with U.S. airlines.

This is not rocket science. The government needs to ban all non-essential flights. It needs to force airlines to refund customers who cancel their trips. It also needs to protect airline jobs in exchange for an appropriate assistance program. Quebecers are sick of half measures.

When is the government going to take action and fix the problem?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers are even more fed up with all this whining, to put it bluntly, coming from the Bloc Québécois.

The government did not respond to the demands of the Bloc; the government makes its own decisions. It is very kind of them, but we do not need the Bloc to make decisions.

We based our decisions on science, logic and common sense. We introduced measures that are among the most effective in the world, both for departures, since airlines have cancelled all such flights, and for arrivals. This will discourage people from travelling, because in order to return, they will have to undergo a battery of tests, pay \$2,000 per person, spend three days in a hotel, and continue to isolate after that. These are strict measures.

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have supported, from the start, emergency funding to help the pandemic unemployed to buy groceries, pay rent and mortgages. Yesterday, a 21-year-old Kingston student boasted in *The New York Times* that he made \$9,000 by making a highly speculative investment of his CERB dollars in a stock market play.

Given that emergency support will be necessary for many more months because of the Liberal vaccine shortfall, how can the government explain easy cash for a stock market play, even as thousands of other Canadians are still denied funds to survive?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians needed support the most, the CERB was there to help over nine million people pay their bills and support their families. It was there to support workers who were unable to work because of COVID. If an applicant was over 15 years old and met all the other criteria, yes, they were able to receive the benefit. We made every effort to support as many Canadian workers as possible, including young Canadians. Many young people work to help support their families, while others live independently and have bills to pay. We are not going to apologize for helping young people.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many deserving Canadian companies are still denied emergency support, like a Thornhill firm, Fleets Coffee, which launched a new business just before the lockdown. A large facility was leased, five mobile coffee shops were acquired, commercial agreements were signed and staff were hired. However, because it had no revenue in the previous year, Fleets Coffee has been denied access to the wage subsidy, rent subsidy and credit availability programs.

Do the Liberals see the inequity in the denials of these flawed programs?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we created the emergency relief programs for businesses, it was very important for us to bridge as many businesses as possible through the pandemic. We also knew we needed to balance that urgent need for support with the creation of programs that have real integrity. Finding that balance can be a challenge, but I am very aware of the challenges that new businesses face. This is something we are looking at closely.

● (1445)

The Speaker: I just want to take a moment to mention something to everyone who is joining us virtually. If the arm on the headset is exactly in front of your mouth, there is a popping sound. It does not bother many people in the chamber, but it is very hard on the interpreters' ears. If members could put the headset a little below or above their mouths, we will not get that popping sound. It would save the ears of our interpreters. We certainly do not want to injure them.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT***[Translation]*

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is saying that Canadians who lose their jobs because of COVID-19 should apply for EI if they are not eligible for the Canada recovery benefit.

This is like Asterix looking for permit A38 in “the place that sends you mad”. If someone applies for EI and does not qualify, they are automatically rejected when they apply for the Canada recovery benefit because they have applied for EI.

Can the Minister of Employment and the Minister of National Revenue get on the same page so that Canadians who qualify for assistance can actually receive it?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that this continues to be a difficult time for many, which is why we transitioned to a simplified EI program and created three new recovery benefits. Service Canada and the CRA work together to share data on Canadians who apply to ensure that one method is paid to someone at any given time. In some instances, yes, this integrity measure can cause a delay. However, we understand that any delay in receiving benefits can be hard for people, so we are continuing to work on this to ensure that Canadians get the benefits they are entitled to in a timely manner.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been asking the government to act on travel, especially with new strains of the virus threatening efforts to bring the pandemic under control, but while the government stalled, thousands of international flights landed in Canada. With the latest announcement, we again see the government saying the right things but introducing half measures that will not keep Canada safe.

Why are flights from known hot spots for new strains not being suspended? Why are even popular sun destinations like Florida missing from the list? When will the government get serious about travel?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that my colleague is calling some of the strictest rules in the world “half measures”.

Let me remind my colleague that as of March of last year, we have asked all Canadians to cancel non-essential flights. We banned foreigners, we implemented a 14-day quarantine, and earlier this year we added a pre-boarding test that is necessary prior to anybody arriving in Canada. Last week, we announced further layers to restrict discretionary travel.

These are important measures that are protecting the health and safety of Canadians.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to guarantee a better and healthier Canada for future generations, we must start taking action to protect our environment now. Our government has recently announced an ambitious climate plan to do exactly that.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources update this House on the government's plan to plant two billion trees over the next 10 years?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in December we launched our plan to plant two billion trees. The first of these trees are going to be planted this spring. Our plan increases annual tree planting in Canada by 40%. It permanently increases forest cover by an area twice the size of P.E.I. We are working with provinces and territories, indigenous communities, NGOs and municipalities to get this right.

Trees matter. They clean our air and water, lower our energy costs and improve our biodiversity. Generations of Canadians for decades to come will recognize the importance of this measure.

* * *

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 11 months into the pandemic we continue to find gaps in federal supports for small businesses. For example, to be eligible for the Canada emergency wage subsidy, a business must have had a payroll account on March 15, 2020, and there are very limited exceptions to this rule. Similar rules are in place for the Canada emergency rent subsidy.

The existing law is detrimental to new businesses that started their operations during the pandemic but are struggling with the same restrictions and revenue losses. Why has the Liberal government not fixed the wage subsidy for start-ups, and will the minister commit to doing so at the earliest opportunity?

● (1450)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every day when I speak to entrepreneurs, I am told again and again how important our wage subsidy is. It is a veritable lifeline for businesses from coast to coast to coast.

Oral Questions

Just recently, we launched a new program, the highly affected businesses program, which is going to support our hospitality industry and our tourism industry. I would like to emphasize how important it is to get the message out to our entrepreneurs across Canada to ensure that they are aware of this new program.

We will continue to work on new programs for new businesses and start-ups, and I would be happy to work with my colleague opposite in order to get his ideas and thoughts.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the last four years, more than 16,000 Canadians have died from opioid overdoses. During that time, Dominic Barton, the Liberals' hand-picked ambassador to China, was turbocharging OxyContin sales, even providing rebates for drug overdoses. Dominic Barton was a managing partner with McKinsey, which is accused of shady deals with China, destroying evidence and stoking the opioid crisis.

Before naming him to key positions in the Liberal government, did the Prime Minister know of Mr. Barton's role in the opioid crisis?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on that question, but I will say that Dominic Barton is an extraordinary ambassador for Canada, given his vast experience with China. Canada can be assured that we are well served by his very hard work in Beijing on behalf of all of Canada.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals cannot avoid this question.

McKinsey, the company that Mr. Barton worked for, is in the process of settling lawsuits over advice it gave to drug companies to aggressively bolster OxyContin sales. In fact, the OxyContin manufacturer has pleaded guilty to criminal charges, including bribing doctors, deliberately contributing to the opioid epidemic.

Again, was the Prime Minister informed of the role that Dominic Barton played in turbocharging the opioid epidemic?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Again, Mr. Speaker, I will say exactly the same thing: I will not comment on those allegations from my colleague, but I will say that Ambassador Barton is doing an extraordinary job on behalf of Canada in Beijing to help build our relationship with an important country, China.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister took office, he told us that deficit financing would boost growth, but in three of the four years that followed, per capita GDP growth has been zero, and that was before COVID. In fact, the last five years of per capita GDP growth have been the worst since the Great Depression.

The government went ahead and asked for \$700 billion more of borrowing authorizations, and since then, the IMF has downgraded growth projections for Canada by a third, below the U.S., the euro-

zone and the average of the advanced economies. When will the government realize that it cannot put economic growth on the national credit card?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the question because it gives me the opportunity to congratulate Canadian businesses on their resilience.

Our GDP increased 0.3% in December, nearly twice as much as the consensus forecast, and our fourth-quarter GDP increased 1.9%. That is an annualized rate of 7.8% and nearly twice as much as the Bank of Canada's forecast.

COVID is tough for our economy and our businesses, but they are doing a terrific job.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition to dragging down growth, government borrowing risks driving up inflation.

According to CIBC economist Avery Shenfeld, additional government spending is being offset by the earlier need to hike interest rates to contain inflation.

Higher interest rates would be a disaster for the households, businesses and governments whose combined debts are almost four times the size of our entire economy. Higher interest rates could collapse our economy.

Why is the government risking our economic future on credit card debts instead of securing it with paycheques?

● (1455)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that our government's policies are working. They are supporting Canadians and Canadian businesses in a very difficult time.

Let me quote David Parkinson in *The Globe and Mail*:

Examining the economic data of 2020, there's no question that the federal government's emergency income-replacement programs were a critical lifeline for Canada during the pandemic. We would have plunged into a much deeper economic hole without them...

That is true, and we are going to continue supporting Canadians and Canadian—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier, the government leader told us that he did not need the Bloc Québécois. Last week, all of the parties joined the leader of the Bloc Québécois in calling for the government to grant citizenship to Raif Badawi. All of the parties, including the Liberals, asked the Minister of Immigration to use his discretionary power to make the political prisoner a citizen. That would make it easier for him to access consular services and for Canada to take steps to free him.

Will the immigration minister consider the unanimous request of the House and make Raif Badawi a Canadian citizen?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada will always defend human rights around the world, and we are closely monitoring Raif Badawi's case. Canadian officials continue to raise his case at the highest level, and we have asked for him to be granted clemency many times. We remain in contact with Ms. Haidar and, of course, we hope that Mr. Badawi will be reunited with his family.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what a frustrating response for Ensaf Haidar. The minister did not even answer the question.

In 2015, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs was in the opposition, he wrote that “the eyes of the world are on Canada to see whether the government will exhaust its diplomatic channels pushing for Raif Badawi's release.” Even the Prime Minister, when he was in the opposition in 2015, was hounding Stephen Harper and telling him that it was time to act. Now they are in power, and all parties are calling on them to make Raif Badawi a Canadian citizen.

The Liberal opposition at the time spoke about Raif Badawi a lot. Those same Liberals are now in power. Will they finally do something?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for his work on this important matter.

The recent motion reflected the fact that Parliament and all Canadians are concerned about the unjust detention of Mr. Badawi. We will keep working with all parliamentarians as we continue our efforts to reunite Mr. Badawi with his family.

Speaking of human rights, I have to ask: When will the leader of the Bloc Québécois apologize to the Minister of Transport for his comments?

* * *

*[English]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 50,000 jobs, that is 50,000 jobs on both sides of the border, are at risk if the Prime Minister does not take serious action to save Line 5.

Enbridge has even been issued new permits by the Michigan government to make a safe project even safer by encasing the exist-

ing pipe in a tunnel along the bottom of the Straits of Mackinac. The natural resources minister has pledged his support.

Will the Prime Minister commit to speaking with President Biden about the importance of saving Line 5?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I have been speaking about this issue. This is obviously hugely important not only for her riding but, as she mentioned, for Canadian industry.

We are working alongside Ambassador Hillman and Consul General Joe Comartin, and I want to thank them for their tireless efforts on this issue.

We are loud and clear on this side of the House: We support Line 5. We will continue to advocate for it.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when asked about Keystone's cancellation, the Liberal-appointed ambassador to the United States simply shrugged, “It's time to let Keystone XL go.” That is what the Liberal government did: denigrate our natural resources sector, ignore the threat of the project being cancelled and then tell thousands of Canadians who are counting on these jobs to let it go.

Oil and gas projects must be part of the way forward for economic recovery, so when will the government actually do something to stand up for clean, ethical and job-creating Canadian energy?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. The interpretation is not working.

The Speaker: We are having a problem with the interpretation.

I think there is a problem with the mikes and headsets. Sometimes the computer mike is on instead of the headset mike. This is a problem for some people, not for everyone.

● (1500)

[English]

For everyone, please check your screen. You will see a little microphone at the bottom. If you click on that, make sure it is on the Plantronics headset and not on the computer microphone, and that will make sure everything comes through clear and we have perfect translation. That is my technology trick for today.

Now we will go on to the hon. minister.

Oral Questions

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is incumbent upon us to safeguard our relationship with the single largest customer for Canadian crude. In fact, over the past five years, Canadian oil has continuously displaced foreign sources in the U.S. market. Canadian crude now represents 60% of all oil imported by the U.S. That is up from 40%.

Because of this government, new pipelines are under construction. Trans Mountain and Line 3 will provide us with the ability to expand our energy exports. We are proud of our energy workers and we support them.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister was the opposition leader of the third party, he suggested that Keystone XL would have been approved if Canada had stronger environmental policy, stronger oversight, tougher penalties and, yes, some sort of means to price carbon pollution. I wonder how that is all working out for the Prime Minister.

How many gut punches does the Prime Minister think energy workers need to take before he is willing to stand up for them and Canada's national interests?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the other night during the emergency debate, I listened carefully to the opposition and some of what the members said really shocked me. The member for Foothills called TMX a white elephant.

On this side of the House, we are proud that TMX is finally being built, no thanks to the Conservatives. TMX has already created 7,000 jobs. It is not a white elephant. Those are real jobs, real workers in Alberta and real support from this government. We are proud of our hard-working oil and gas workers. We have their backs.

* * *

[Translation]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week marks the 25th anniversary of the designation of February as Black History Month, thanks to a motion moved by the Hon. Jean Augustine in this Parliament. This is a month to celebrate, remember and recognize the many contributions made by Black people and what they have accomplished here in Canada.

Would the Minister of Diversity tell us about our government's commitments to a fairer and more inclusive Canada?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Bourassa for his leadership. As he knows, our government will always support all Black communities in Canada. We have invested millions of dollars in a number of areas: building capacity in Black communities, supporting young Black Canadians, culturally focused mental health programs, entrepreneurship and the anti-racism strategy.

We know we still have work to do. During Black History Month, I invite everyone to join us in celebrating and recognizing the many contributions Black Canadians have made over the past 400-plus years.

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba farmers, ranchers, first nations, cottage owners and municipalities are all stuck in limbo because of Liberal dithering and inaction. Despite repeated calls from the Province of Manitoba, the Liberal government refuses to sign the joint agreement for the Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin outlet channels project.

For the last five years, Liberals promised to fund the channel, to protect Manitobans and to reduce the catastrophic damages from future floods, but they refuse to put pen to paper to make it happen.

Why are these Liberals failing Manitobans again?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would correct the record. We have been working very actively with the Government of Manitoba on this issue. The Government of Manitoba has now provided the first tranche of information to the Impact Assessment Agency. We continue to await the second tranche of information that would allow us to proceed through the process, as it should be done, as it is always done. We are working very productively with the minister of infrastructure in Manitoba on this issue.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, documents we obtained on sole-sourced COVID spending by the Liberal government show a baffling item. Over \$115,000 was paid out to Poets Cove luxury resort by Fisheries and Oceans in April 2020, a month after the pandemic was declared.

How does spending \$115,000 of taxpayer money at a secluded millionaire luxury resort help Canadians in the fight against COVID?

● (1505)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to speak with the member directly and get more information about the contract to which he is referring. If it is a PSPC matter, I will take it under advisement. If not, I will ensure our government gets back to him.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, parents in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex have struggled to participate in online classes because of slow Internet. Some of my constituents are receiving \$800 Internet bills because their only connection is through cell service. The government has promised to expand rural Internet infrastructure, but, as usual, the Liberals are all talk and no action.

Will the minister tell rural Canadians, like mine in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, why they should have to choose between educating their children and paying their home heating bills?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague speaks to a frustration that far too many Canadians are experiencing, particularly during COVID. We have heard them. In our first mandate we invested to connect 1.7 million households to this essential service. In this mandate that works continues with additional funds, making the Government of Canada the single largest government investor in broadband ever.

Just last week, our partnership with southwestern Ontario with SWIFT moved forward. Partners in Wellington are now connected, communities in Caledon are beginning their construction and there is more news to come.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 11, the J.A. Douglas McCurdy Airport in Sydney, in my riding of Cape Breton—Canso, bid farewell to its last commercial flight indefinitely. The member for Sydney—Victoria and I have heard from countless constituents about their concerns around flight resumption.

Could the hon. Minister of Transport please update the House and my constituents in Cape Breton—Canso on the work our government is doing to secure air travel in my region and regions in similar situations across the country?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his strong advocacy for his region and for this matter. We know how regional airports are important for workers and communities in Cape Breton and across the country.

The air sector has been hit hard by the pandemic and that is why the government will invest more than \$1.1 billion to support key players, such as airport authorities and regional airlines. Discussions with major airlines on support for the sector are ongoing right now and we will prioritize the reinstallation of regional routes that connect our communities, such as Sydney.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the independent investigation unit of Manitoba cleared the police officer involved in the fatal shooting of 16-year-old Eishia Hudson of any charges. The police officer was not questioned, pro-

Oral Questions

vided a statement and that was the end of it. Police violence without consequence in Canada is a norm: Rodney Levi, Chantel Moore and others, all resulting in deaths.

How many deaths of indigenous people at the hands of police need to happen before the government acts?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. We recognize the importance of transparency and accountability for all police actions. The relationship between the police and the people they serve has to be predicated on trust, and that trust requires transparency and accountability for all police actions.

We have made commitments to bring forward reform on these issues and we are working with our provincial and territorial partners to ensure that all Canadians can be assured that police actions will always be accountable to the people they serve.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians already find it difficult to make ends meet, and this pandemic has only made things worse. To reduce the cost of living, the government asked telecommunications providers to lower their already high prices by 25% over three years.

• (1510)

[Translation]

Can the minister explain how the government will make sure those prices really do come down?

[English]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the concerns of Canadians and families when it comes to their cellphone bills. That is why our government is taking action to make services more affordable in keeping with our commitment to bring down prices by 25%. The latest affordability tracker is now public so people can see for themselves where prices are going.

The good news is that the tracker shows that prices for most plans have decreased between 10% and 18% in Canada.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CANADA-UNITED KINGDOM TRADE CONTINUITY AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

The House resumed from January 29 consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to implement the Agreement on Trade Continuity between Canada and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: It being 3:10 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-18.

Call in the members.

• (1555)

The Speaker:

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

(Division No. 43)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Alghabra
Alleslev	Allison
Amos	Anand
Anandasangaree	Arnold
Arseneault	Arya
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baker
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Benzen
Bergeron	Berthold
Bérubé	Bessette
Bezan	Bibeau
Bittle	Blair
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Bloch	Blois
Boudrias	Bragdon
Brassard	Bratina
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Carr
Carrie	Casey
Chabot	Chagger
Champagne	Champoux
Charbonneau	Chen
Chiu	Chong
Cooper	Cumming
d'Entremont	Dabrusin
Dalton	Damoff
Dancho	Davidson
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
Desbiens	Desilets
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diotte	Doherty
Dong	Dowdall
Dreeshen	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz

Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Epp	Erskine-Smith
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Fergus
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Gallant
Garneau	Gaudreau
Généreux	Genuis
Gerretsen	Gill
Gladu	Godin
Gould	Gourde
Gray	Guilbeault
Hajdu	Hallan
Harder	Hardie
Hoback	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Ien	Jaczek
Jansen	Jeneroux
Joly	Jones
Jordan	Jowhari
Kelloway	Kelly
Kent	Khalid
Khera	Kitchen
Kniec	Koutrakis
Kram	Kurek
Kusie	Kusmierczyk
Lake	Lalonde
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Larouche
Lattanzio	Lauzon
Lawrence	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lehoux	Lemire
Lewis (Essex)	Liepert
Lightbound	Lobb
Long	Longfield
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	Lukiwski
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKenzie
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maguire
Maloney	Marcil
Martel	Martinez Ferrada
May (Cambridge)	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLean
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Melillo	Mendès
Mendicino	Michaud
Miller	Monsef
Moore	Morantz
Morrison	Morrissey
Motz	Murray
Nater	Ng
Normandin	O'Connell
O'Regan	O'Toole
Oliphant	Patzer
Paul-Hus	Pauzé
Perron	Petitpas Taylor
Plamondon	Poilievre
Powlowski	Qualtrough
Ratansi	Rayes
Redekopp	Regan
Reid	Rempel Garner
Richards	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Rood

Ruff	Sahota (Calgary Skyview)
Sahota (Brampton North)	Saini
Sajjan	Saks
Samson	Sangha
Sarai	Saroya
Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Scheer	Schiefke
Schmale	Schulte
Seeback	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Shields
Shin	Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simard	Simms
Sorbara	Soroka
Spengemann	Stanton
Steinley	Ste-Marie
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Tabbara
Tassi	Thériault
Therrien	Tochor
Trudel	Turnbull
Uppal	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Van Popta
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Vecchio
Vidal	Viersen
Vignola	Virani
Vis	Wagantall
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Weiler
Wilkinson	Williamson
Wong	Yip
Young	Yurdiga
Zahid	Zann
Zimmer	Zuberi — 300

NAYS

Members

Ashton	Atwin
Bachrach	Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Boulerice
Cannings	Collins
Davies	Duvall
Garrison	Gazan
Green	Harris
Hughes	Johns
Julian	Kwan
MacGregor	Manly
Masse	Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	McPherson
Qaqqaq	Singh — 26

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on International Trade.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

VOTING PROCESS

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that several members shut off their cameras temporarily. Would it be possible to make sure that does not happen again? The whips

Routine Proceedings

agreed on that, and I feel cameras should be on for the duration of the vote.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for La Prairie for his observation and I would remind all hon. members that during a vote, their microphone is to be turned on only when they are voting, but their camera is to stay on for the duration of the vote.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and Standing Order 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 10th report later this day.

* * *

EQUALIZATION AND TRANSFERS FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-263, An Act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act (equalization).

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act with regard to equalization. For short, it is called the equalization and transfers fairness act.

This act would do the following: publish publicly all calculations on equalization; publish all consultation documents with the provinces; remove the per capita cap of \$170 being proposed in the fall economic statement, which is about \$3 billion for the Government of Alberta; bind the government to negotiate in good faith in referendums conducted by a provincial government under provincial legislation; and finally, rename the badly called Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act, when it is truly the equalization and transfers act.

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

* * *

• (1600)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

S.O. 52

I declare the motion carried.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, the time provided for the debate pursuant to Standing Order 51 shall end no later than 6:30 p.m. today.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

I declare the motion carried.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of Canadian citizens deeply concerned about the vicious and ongoing genocide of the Uighur peoples by the Communist Chinese government. They express their condemnation of the Communist government's use of forced abortions and sterilizations, forced labour, family separations and forced indoctrination and detention in what has been described as concentration camps.

These citizens are calling on the Government of Canada to formally recognize that Uighurs in China have been and are still subject to genocide and to use Magnitsky act sanctions against those who are guilty of these crimes against humanity. I hope the government will faithfully deal with these citizens' concerns.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to present a petition on behalf of signatories to recognize the atrocities put on the Uighur people by the Chinese Communist Party. They call on the House of Commons to formally recognize that the Uighurs have been and are being subjected to genocide and to use the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, better known as the Magnitsky act, and sanction those responsible for such actions.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to join my colleagues in presenting a petition highlighting the horrific human rights abuses targeting Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. The petitioners note reports of forced sterilization, forced abortion, systemic sexual violence and mass detention in concentration camps. They note that these crimes clearly violate the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada and the House of Commons to recognize that Uighur Muslims are victims of an ongoing genocide. They also call on the Government of Canada,

and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in particular, to hold those involved in this genocide accountable by using Magnitsky sanctions to target those involved in these gross crimes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you may notice that there are citizens from across this country expressing the same concern through petitions, and that concern is regarding the situation with the Uighurs in China. The petitioners are calling on the government to deem it a genocide and to look at implementing Magnitsky sanctions on those responsible for this heinous crime.

* * *

● (1605)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

COVID-19 VARIANTS

The Speaker: The Chair has a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to request an emergency debate on the current situation regarding the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically to the new threat posed by mutations, known as variants. The spread of the novel coronavirus variants is cause for grave concern, if not alarm. We believe it constitutes an emergency in which Parliament should engage.

The variants have been primarily identified as being from the U.K., which is known as B.1.1.7; from South Africa, known as B.1.351; and from Brazil and Japan, known as P.1. The evidence as to whether these variants are more deadly than the original COVID-19 appears to be divided. However, medical reports from around the world consistently point to the variants as being significantly more transmissible.

With COVID-19 spreading more rapidly due to the variants, there is risk of exponential growth in cases of COVID-19, which may overwhelm our health care systems. There is also the risk that increased spread will lead to more mutations, which may be more deadly or vaccine-resistant.

As a nation, Canada has struggled with establishing a coordinated response to the pandemic. Green MPs are concerned that there have been moves to ease restrictions precisely at a time when federal health officials have recommended that we maintain or even increase measures in response to these new variants. Canada should be able to identify the jurisdictions that have had the greatest success and use those examples to inform winning coordinated strategies across the country. We believe there is an urgent need to debate whether now is the time to shift gears from bending a curve to going to zero cases, or as close to zero as possible.

We are entering more dangerous territory. Should the government increase warnings about the changing nature and risks due to the variants? Should the federal government increase the coordination of efforts among the provinces? An emergency debate would assist in identifying those options.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Nanaimo—Lady-smith for his intervention. However, I am not satisfied that his request meets the requirements of the standing order at this time.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[English]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before the break, I was talking about heckling and the importance of the interaction that it can facilitate, at least when done well. I know my friend for Saanich—Gulf Islands is going to weigh in on that, and I look forward to what she is going to say.

Absent the changes I have proposed, I suggest that we insert a mechanism of written heckling, whereby members could post a written message, while a person is speaking, in response to things they are saying. These written heckles would appear on screen under the video of the person speaking, allowing the public and other members to see them and allowing the Speaker to respond to or ignore them as he or she chooses.

The point of heckling is to give the opportunity for substantive interjection. Perhaps members who do not like the excessive noise will appreciate the proposal for a mechanism of written heckling, at least for the time being. If it works well, we might consider continuing it when virtual Parliament ends, allowing members to heckle from their phones instead of with their voices. This will allow more voices to be heard and will still facilitate that kind of ongoing interaction.

The fact that only one instead of many voices can be heard is a key way in which virtual Parliament is not real Parliament, and I look forward to getting back to the real thing. Living with my young family in western Canada, there are many ways that virtual Parliament carries personal advantages, but the public interest is not served by the prolonging of this virtual Parliament any more than is absolutely necessary.

Orders of the Day

Finally, I believe we should dramatically increase the slots available for Private Members' Business and create a mechanism whereby substantial pieces of private members' legislation can be prioritized over motions. A member who simply wants to propose a committee study can propose a motion anytime at a committee rather than in the House. Our primary job is not to be goodwill ambassadors for government programs or to run Service Canada outlooks in our ridings. Our job as legislators and members of Parliament is to legislate in Parliament.

Anyone else can attend a pie-making contests in my riding, but only I can be here to do the hard work of passing laws. However, absurdly, only a minuscule proportion of members, even in a four-year Parliament, will ever have the time or the opportunity to take a legislative proposal through to conclusion. Many good ideas, which in some cases enjoy unanimous support, have not moved forward because of time constraints.

Therefore, I would like to see us increase the length of the sitting day by one hour and double the number of slots for Private Members' Business. Our institutions would improve if we had a greater opportunity for all members of Parliament to do their most fundamental job, which is to legislate and put forward ideas for legislative changes and reforms that other members should consider.

These are ideas that I think all members would appreciate and consider. We can try to move forward in a consensus way that would improve the rules and reflects the consensus of all parties.

• (1610)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's comments with respect to question period.

Manitoba once had a system where the questions and answers were long. I was relieved when we adopted what Ottawa had and limited them to less than a minute. It made a huge difference in the number of questions being asked.

When I was in opposition, I would often say that the government never answered my question. When I am on the government side, I say that maybe we should be reflecting on questions. However, when it comes time for PROC to deal with this issue, I believe that people need to stop thinking in terms of an opposition and a government perspective. There is a reason certain questions are asked. There is a reason certain answers are provided. We need to look at ways to depoliticize this, take the party out of it and ask one question: What is better for our democracy inside the chamber, and how can the rules affect that?

I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts on the importance of depoliticizing, taking the parties—

Orders of the Day

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but we do have to allow for other questions and comments. The hon. member has already asked his question, so I am sure that we know what he is asking.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I do not know if the member's question was totally clear. Maybe he is simply trying to demonstrate the problems we see in question period. As to his comments about depoliticizing question period, I am inclined to quote Hyman Roth from *The Godfather: Part II*: "This is the business we've chosen."

On the issue that I tried to get at in my speech, I would agree in principle that we are not going to make question period better or worse by dramatically changing the time limits. The reality is that we already have a mechanism, known as the late show or adjournment debate, where we can have longer-form interactions. One simple improvement we could have is to require ministers to answer questions on their own files during adjournment debate and perhaps move what we now call "Adjournment Proceedings" to a time earlier in the day when it gets more attention.

Let us use the rubrics we have and maybe strengthen and move them around. This would at least provide an opportunity for a longer-form back-and-forth.

• (1615)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, as my hon. colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan accurately predicted, I will have comments on the notion that heckling can be good for our Parliament. It does violate our Standing Orders, although we would never know it from the normal course of affairs.

I very much agree with the comments made earlier by the hon. member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne. He pointed out that constituents want to see us behave respectfully toward each other, and the more we veer toward rudeness and a lack of decorum, the less Parliament has the respect of our constituents, our citizens. Even though the Parliament of Westminster in London, England, does have the occasional jeering and heckling, it does not approach the rudeness of our place.

I wonder if the hon. member would consider that we look at the way Parliament and question period are managed in the U.K. as a model for Canada.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I do not disagree with the member that there are problems with the way heckling is often operationalized in practice, but I think the purpose of allowing heckling and why it has been part of our traditions for a long time is the idea that there can be valuable, useful and respectful interjections.

Sometimes it happens that while I am speaking, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader will say something to me and I will listen to what he is saying and respond to it in the midst of my speech. That is the ideal. It is not just a bunch of noise and people being shouted down. That should not happen. If there is an opportunity for respectful interjection and meaningful exchange instead of just monologuing, that is the ideal we should get at.

That is why I said I would be very interested in our exploring alternative models like written heckling. Instead of members shouting out interventions, they could post interventions to the Speaker and the wider public, allowing the Speaker to then respond to them. For virtual Parliament, it might be worth it to experiment with creating a mechanism for written heckles.

Again, not all heckling is good. Probably most heckling is not good. However, the tradition exists for a reason.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful to have these few minutes to talk about two things. They are ideas that have been floated in my existence in Parliament and in my experience with other issues. I think we can improve upon them in the modernization of the House.

One that was thrust upon us, which I will not spend too much time on as my time is limited, is electronic voting. I am a fan of electronic voting. I do believe in coming into the 20th century, as there is technology that existed back then that we can use and are using now.

I truly believe this is going to be a benefit for all of us. It is a benefit for our family lives and is certainly a benefit for those of us who travel quite a bit, like me or members from Yukon who have to travel a bit. This certainly would make travel less onerous. I will leave it at that. We are about to embark upon that new frontier because of the situation we are in.

I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to a dear colleague of mine, the member for Simcoe North, who first brought to me a very in-depth study about the parallel chamber. The parallel chamber opens up a huge dimension, not to get too science fiction about it, for debate within the context of what is Canada's Parliament. It has been done, as other colleagues have mentioned, in other areas. The member for Yukon brought it up as well. Two parallel chambers already exist in other jurisdictions, such as Great Britain and Australia. They are the Federation Chamber of Australia and Westminster Hall in the U.K.

As a matter of fact, The Samara Centre for Democracy, here in Canada, strongly recommends that we go ahead with a parallel chamber to allow members to exercise some independence as to how they want to engage in debate and policy issues important to them and to the nation. It may not be something they bring up, but others may bring something up that they wish to comment on.

The Samara Centre for Democracy recommends creating a parallel chamber modelled on Westminster Hall in the U.K., and I could not agree more. Westminster Hall is a valuable example of how we can broaden debate in the House, certainly for those in the dimensions of what is considered the backbench who wish to bring up their own local issues and discuss national issues from coast to coast to coast. It would be a good exercise for them.

Orders of the Day

There are, however, some key notes to make about the parallel chamber. This is going back to a 2018 MP survey that Samara did. It does exit interviews with MPs once they are no longer MPs, and it discovered that debates are the least satisfying dimension of an MP's work.

Those who have been here for a while, or others who enjoy debate, would certainly agree that in many cases we talk about canned speeches and lines we must say. I am not diminishing the role of people who write speeches and send them off to the House of Commons to be read by whichever department or minister's office. It is a part of who we are and a function of who we are. However, we need to broaden this more to help people who want to speak freely and openly about these debates, whether it is something they feel, as a parliamentarian, is dear to their heart or it is something dear to the hearts of their constituents. Sometimes that may not be caught up in a sound bite or a phrase the government or opposition wishes to put out there, but it could be in their own words, which I think is very key to this. I would endorse that.

By way of example, one of the things the parallel chamber is used for in the United Kingdom, in Westminster Hall, is take-note debates on e-petitions. E-petitions have become very valuable and highly popular over the past little while, and we could debate their subject matter and issues in the House.

Right now, there is an e-petition about the Gander International Airport, which is in my riding, that sits in the roster waiting for signatures. The petition calls on the government to help it out in this particular scenario. I would love to engage in a debate not only with the Gander airport but also with airports across Canada that find themselves in a very rural, regional situation where survival is now tedious.

• (1620)

That would be a great example of how we could broaden the debate about regional air travel across this country and a golden opportunity that a parallel chamber could provide for us. That is huge to me. Again, I recognize the member for Simcoe North, the Deputy Speaker, for the work he did in bringing this to my attention.

Let me now go to what we normally call S. O. 31s or members' statements. In the genesis of S. O. 31s, the member could talk about their riding, a current policy issue, or they could stand up and do a one-minute political ad for their party, for that matter, which happens fairly often. If the member is in opposition, they could take swipe at the government. For someone who was in opposition for quite some time, I certainly took advantage of that. However, the key, the basis of it all, is the fact that the statement belongs to the member. That is what is so very important about this.

If the list is provided by the whip, something very dysfunctional ends up happening with members' statements. What happens is that if the whip has a statement they want to put out that is in praise of the latest government policy or of an opposition stand or something against the government, the whip will give that to a particular member, or at least show it to them and ask if they are willing to do it in the House. If that member says they are not interested and would rather do their own statement, more often than not the statement

suggested by the whip will go to another member, who will be asked if they want to do it.

That is a fundamental breach of what this statement should be. The statement does not belong to the member anymore, but to the caucus, the party or the whip's office. That is not the way it was meant to be.

My suggestion would be that members' statements be done similar to private members' bills, where there is a rotating list. Members would apply to read a statement and statements would be handled by the Speaker in the rotation in which they arrive. I will leave it at that, because I think that how members' statements should be done is quite self-explanatory.

I know that some people would like to hold question period that way. That is how it is done in Westminster in the U.K. House of Commons. Their members apply to the Speaker to be in a random draw three days prior to question period, to get their question in, under Prime Minister's questions. I will not go that far yet. I walk before I run, as it were. I walk in marginal steps. That shows how long I have been there, because I know that sometimes changes like this travel at glacial speed. Therefore, I will just leave it at that.

Here is something that I proposed some time ago. It met with a lot of bewilderment in many cases, but it is something that the U.K. has done as well since 2010 or 2011, and that is the election of committee chairs, of which I am proudly one. I love being chair of the heritage committee. In the U.K., they started a process where the committee chairs were broken up in proportion to party representation in the House. As a result, the fourth or fifth party recognized in the House would get a chair or two, and the chairs would be broken down that way. Right now, I think the Conservative Party has slightly more than half of the committee chairs. The actual chair occupant is decided by the House. They have a broad vote in the House of Commons about who it should be. There could be three or four Liberals for one seat, three or four Conservatives vying for another seat, and the whole House gets to vote on who they are.

I first noticed it when I went to the U.K. and had meetings with some MPs. I noticed this pamphlet, an elections-style pamphlet, saying vote for so-and-so, in a riding near Wales. That member was running to be the agriculture chair. I thought it was a fascinating concept.

We should have a deep look into that. Former clerks of the House of Commons in Great Britain have said it has been a wonderful exercise, where the Chair has an air of independence about them. They are able to go out and do things without any shackles of party interference. It is something we should seriously look at. Hopefully down the road we can. It is something I proposed in the last Parliament, but it never made it to a vote, unfortunately.

There is something else I want to talk about, and this is probably the more controversial one. It is called—

Orders of the Day

• (1625)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have been trying to signal the hon. member that his time is up, unfortunately. I am sure he will have time during questions and comments.

The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame and I enjoyed a long time on the PROC committee in the last Parliament dealing with one of the government motions. There is a Yiddish proverb that says “Men don't build on strange ground.” I want to critique the member's proposal for a second chamber.

Going back to what I said earlier, until we fix debate in this chamber, we should not be setting up a second chamber to simply replicate what already happens here. The member is absolutely right about reading of speeches, when stock documents are given to members to read in the House. We should get it right here first and not repeat in a second chamber what we do here until we correct all of the deficiencies here. I wonder what the member thinks of that.

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, it is nice to see the member engage in debate with me again, because I remember doing this at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I enjoyed his input there as I do now. He has a valid point, I agree. I honestly think, though, that for the House to fix itself, it depends on the members taking charge and doing that. However, there is another expression called “blowing off steam”, as it were. In a second or parallel chamber we could find ourselves in an organic debate led by the passions of individual members talking about these issues, where they could formulate these to a point where that chamber becomes an excellent model. It would be like little brother behaving well to show big brother how it is done.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, to my hon. colleague from one island on the west coast to a favourite island on the east coast, the member asked why we allow other people in the back room to write speeches for members. Our rules require that we be able to stand on our feet and deliver a speech without notes, without reading a speech. Obviously, that is not our custom, but one of the outcomes of the practice that the member referenced is that the House leaders do not have to share with each other how many speakers they really have on an issue. If we were confined to only those members of Parliament who could actually speak to the issue without notes, we would not be able to put up a bunch of wooden soldiers that last forever to block debate and make the House less functional.

What are the member's thoughts on that?

• (1630)

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, for whom I have a deep respect as one of my colleagues on the democracy caucus and who is now in fact its chair.

It is a valid point. From one island to the other, I have said this before and have taken flack for it, but I will say it again, that if members cannot stand in the House of Commons and speak for 10 minutes without notes, they probably should not be here. It is as simple as that. We are led by passion. We are led by the size of our hearts and how we deal with these issues. If we constantly stand

and read speeches from the department, whose fault is that? It is actually ours. It is our fault because we allow ourselves to do that.

I do not diminish the role of people in the departments who do this. It has to happen at some point, which parliamentary secretaries and others are keen to do because that is their job, but it is our fault when we do not.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to talk a little more about the S. O. 31s because I noticed that it seems that there are some individuals in the House who never get up on an S. O. 31, or very rarely. I wonder what the member thinks of an idea similar to the lottery that we have for Private Members' Business at the beginning of each Parliament. Every member would get a number and be placed in the order of precedence for S. O. 31s to make sure that everyone gets an equal number of those statements to make during every parliamentary session.

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. I thank her.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today.

What I like about today's take-note debate is that it is very collegial. It is a constructive debate with members making suggestions and rising above partisanship. I find that very engaging, and that is what a take-note debate on procedural enhancements should be.

As I mentioned earlier, I am very pleased and honoured to be an MP and to be here representing the riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. COVID-19 has certainly turned everything upside down for most of us and created challenges for the House of Commons. We have managed to adapt and to continue our work. Dear colleagues, we are all passionate people who have a great desire to contribute. There are always improvements to be made in the House and elsewhere. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this take-note debate.

I would like to go back in time a little. The last debate on the Standing Orders and procedure was held on October 6, 2016. I was a newly elected member when the Leader of the Government proposed that this House take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees.

I had the opportunity to respond to my hon. colleague from Vancouver Quadra, who was then a Liberal member of Parliament and parliamentary secretary to the President of the Treasury Board. She spoke about the need to rebalance the parliamentary calendar for the good of parliamentarians and to reduce the number of sitting days.

Orders of the Day

Having now begun my second term after completing my first, I have made some observations of my own that I would like to share with my colleagues. I am going to talk about four points that I think are important and that I want to bring to the attention of the 338 members of Parliament.

I want to start by pointing out that there are a lot of similarities among the 338 ridings, such as the desire to contribute to our society and to the well-being of Canadians. There are also a lot of differences in our philosophies, beliefs and ways of handling situations or problems. There are social, cultural and physical differences. There are differing opinions. We all experience that here during each sitting and each committee meeting, as well as within our own caucuses. Not only is this normal, but it is also necessary for a healthy democracy. After all, our parties are not homogeneous, nor are our municipalities and nor is nature. Our own families, no matter how big, are not even homogeneous.

It is our differences that help us to learn empathy. I think that our differences are very important and that they are an important part of our democracy. However, we need to respect the institution. It is an enormous privilege to represent the Canadians in each of our ridings as federal MPs. I would like to remind members of some very important principles that we should apply here in the House, namely, loyalty, fairness and respect. We, the 338 members of the House of Commons, all have the obligation to respect the Speaker and the institution.

Second, I would like to suggest that there be a question period especially for backbenchers. It could be done using a random draw, like we do with Private Members' Business. It is important to understand that there are political parties and partisanship in a parliament. That is completely normal and it helps to get things done. However, there are members who represent ridings who never get to speak to stand up for the interests of their constituents, and I think that all Canadians have the right to this forum to get things done. We should think about that.

Some people have said that those who get to give members' statements should be chosen by a random draw. Others said that a draw should be used to appoint committee members and chairs. We need to create openness. As parliamentarians, we should not necessarily give all the power to our political parties.

Many members who were elected to represent the Canadians in their ridings never or hardly ever have the opportunity to ask a question during question period even though that accounts for 45 minutes per day.

I am not advocating on my own behalf. My party gives me the privilege of asking many questions. I am lucky I can tell my constituents that I speak in the House of Commons every week, and that is impressive. Not all 338 members can say they are defending the interests of the citizens who elected them even though those members are here to represent their ridings. As I said, there are 338 members in the 43rd Parliament, and we represent the entire population, some 38 million people.

• (1635)

Every member should have access to a predetermined question period with a number of time slots so that all members can have

that parliamentary privilege. The process could be like the lottery that takes place at the beginning of each Parliament. I suggest that we reserve the first five questions during Friday's question period and hold a draw at the beginning of each new Parliament, just as we do for Private Members' Business. All parliamentarians should have the right to that forum on behalf of their constituents. That is one way to ensure the widest variety of questions and to make people aware of what is going on in every part of this great nation. That should be one of the rights of every parliamentarian. Of course, everyone with an official role in the House should be excluded from the draw. I suggest this new process as a way to respect principles of equality and equity for all parliamentarians.

Thirdly, I would like to suggest that we come up with a description of the dress code. It is something we are noticing these days, but we also experienced it when we voted through the night. It is important to properly define the dress code. The book on procedure does not really have a comprehensive description of the dress code. Obviously it is a question of style and things change, but I think there needs to be stricter guidelines. We waste too much time on points of order on the dress code for MPs.

During this period of hybrid Parliament, there are so many things that cause unavoidable delays. It is only natural, and that was not a criticism. It is just a fact. There are problems with the microphones, the cameras, the connectivity, interpretation and so on. We should form a committee to establish and write the most comprehensive dress code possible. In my humble opinion, we must respect the decorum of our institution. One tangible way to do that is to clearly define our dress code. For example, wearing jeans should never be accepted in the House. Last week, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie wore a hoodie over his tie. He had good intentions, but there was an outcry. It made the headlines.

We are not usually allowed to wear that type of clothing in the House. However, hon. members who wish to get permission might ask the Chair. If the request is approved, the Chair will have to notify the House. In some cases, in special situations, it would be possible to wear such and such an article of clothing in the House, such as a hoodie with festival colours, a hat or any other promotional article.

I think it is important to have a list of the clothing we can wear in the House. I have seen people wearing hoodies and I have even seen people wearing running apparel. That is unacceptable. We have to respect the institution.

Orders of the Day

Lastly, when the Speaker reaches an agreement with some leaders and members, he or she should inform the House. I rose on a point of order because the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was using a telephone. I asked the Speaker whether this had been authorized. The Speaker answered that there was an agreement. I checked on my side and noted that we had not received this information. In the interest of transparency, I believe that all members should be informed of what has been authorized. I am not challenging the decisions made, I just want to be kept informed. I believe that it is important.

At the start of the last Parliament, I was a candidate for the office of Speaker of the House. Members know the interest and commitment I bring to Parliament. I would do my utmost to ensure respect for our institution. As I mentioned, I have been a candidate for this position in the past. This shows my attention and keen interest in this matter. I believe that it is in all members' interest to work together to make Parliament better.

I listened to what my colleagues have to say about this and I took copious notes. I want members to know that I will ensure that the rights of all parliamentarians in the House from every party will be respected.

• (1640)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I found one thing he mentioned very interesting. He spoke about decorum and what constitutes appropriate attire in a hybrid Parliament or when sitting in the chamber.

It is fairly easy to set a dress code for men by deciding whether or not they should wear a jacket, a tie and so forth. It is a little more complicated for women, and I would like to hear how my colleague thinks we could determine what is appropriate attire for them. How could we establish a dress code for women in the House?

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond for his question.

It is not easy to establish a dress code, but we could refer to fabrics and exclude all denim, for example. I have seen female ministers wearing denim jackets and male members wearing jeans. If we want to have decorum and a proper dress code, all we have to do is ban sweatshirts and jeans.

I do not claim to know everything, so I suggest we create a committee in the next parliamentary session to establish this dress code. All parties would be represented, and the committee would be responsible for upholding the dress code, people's rights and our institution.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great detail to my colleague's intervention. He talked about a dress code and what members are wearing. I am not saying I disagree with him, but I am curious about his intent. Is he worried that people are wearing clothes that are too casual?

If that is the case, it does not really correspond with the way business culture is changing. It seems as though people are dressing more casually these days, regardless of where they work. There

used to be a time when one could not wear jeans in a restaurant or bar, but places are evolving and changing.

I am curious about his intent. Does he think people are not respecting that, or does he want to set a standard?

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Kingston and the Islands.

As I said in my speech, this is not an easy file. However, we should not be afraid to raise these issues and come up with a reference tool to simplify them and avoid controversy. There will always be controversy, but like fashion, this file is always changing.

Anyone who is not wearing a jacket will not be admitted to the parliamentary dining room. I understand what my colleague is saying, but I think that we need a framework, even if it means updating and reviewing it every two years or with every new Parliament. I am very open to that idea. However, first, we need to resolve these issues. It is something that needs to be done even though it is hard.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I did not hear much from my colleague about what we have learned in the past year about how Parliament can operate in the new ways the pandemic has forced on us, such as hybrid sittings, online committee meetings and app-based voting. A lot of those things would be very attractive to people like me who represent ridings on the other side of the country. It often takes me, at the best of times, 12 hours to get to Ottawa. Now that might be two or three days.

Could he comment on what aspects of how we have been doing business might be put into practice in a new set of standing orders?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from South Okanagan—West Kootenay in British Columbia.

As I say every time I meet with constituents, even though I may not be meeting with very many these days, some good things will come out of what we are going through right now. I did not mention that in my speech, but there are good things that we can continue with. I have to say that we are learning at lightning speed, and I am very interested in learning about best practices so that we can retain the positive elements that will make us even more effective here in the House of Commons.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order.

Orders of the Day

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for North Island—Powell River, Veterans Affairs; the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay, Employment; the hon. member for Calgary Centre, Natural Resources.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this debate, which is on a subject that is near and dear to my heart.

I have been an elected representative for several years now, first at the provincial level and now at the federal level. I think the debate we are having is a good one. I really appreciate this conversation, which I hope will lead to solutions.

I have four points I would like to make in my speech today. First of all, I have to say that I do use notes, because otherwise, I tend to digress in a 10-minute speech. I am francophone and sometimes tend to talk too much.

The first thing I want to talk about today with my colleagues in the House is voting.

[English]

It is absolutely necessary that the voting system be modernized. I had the privilege a few years ago of visiting the island of Jersey. I toured its legislature, the State Assembly. The island of Jersey is a very small jurisdiction, especially compared with Canada, but like us it has a constitutional monarchy and a history of French and English bilingualism. For some time it has been operating with an electronic voting system from the desks of the members. When I was there, the voting was conducted in French.

• (1650)

[Translation]

The choices were “yes”, “no” and “abstain”.

I thought it was really important to examine this innovation, which could be used here in the House.

[English]

With respect to the pandemic, I hope we will look back favourably on what went on in this chamber and learn from our ability to do things better or improve things. Some members may prefer the old system, which is fair. That is why we are having this debate today. However, I think there is a need to truthfully address the way in which we vote. Later today we will have our first simulated vote using an application that will allow us to vote appropriately, from a health perspective, and with a sense of security. This will ensure we do what we are here to do, which is not only debate, but also vote. That is one of our roles as legislators. Having this amazing opportunity to look at how this chamber can transition from a very old system to a new one is certainly exciting.

The other perspective I want to bring forward is with respect to the controversy of Fridays. We have heard many debates on whether we should sit for more or fewer hours in the House. I have to reflect on my time at Queen's Park in Ontario. When I was a member of the provincial Parliament, although we did not sit on Fridays, I never once felt like I did not work on Fridays. I want to

clarify that for everyone, especially the residents of Orléans, whom I have the pleasure of representing. Friday was the day that many of us in the Ontario legislature were able to meet with stakeholders and engage with our local constituents. People say that going from Toronto to Ottawa is not that far, but I can appreciate how difficult it is for many of my colleagues. I have had brief conversations with parliamentarians on both sides of the House. Many of them have said it is great to be home to see their kids a bit more. I am very fortunate: I gave birth 26 years ago, so I do not have young children, but one day I may have grandchildren. I appreciate the debate we are having today about how Fridays could possibly be reconstructed to look different, but the ultimate question for me is why we have to sit on Fridays. We could structure our calendar adequately over four days, from Monday to Thursday. That is the perspective I carry and wanted to share it with everyone today.

The other perspective that is dear to my heart, and I am so happy to hear many members reflect on this, are the dual chambers, or parallel chambers. We think about the importance of debate and our being able to convey the messages of our community and the people whom we represent, and sometimes, like today, a more personal aspect of how this chamber should operate. The perspective of having two chambers would be an ideal solution where we could find a meaningful approach to democracy, which I truthfully respect. We could debate bills, including private members' bills. A government bill could possibly go to the other chamber to allow members, and sometimes use the government, to choose a bill on which they know we would need to reflect, because not everyone will agree.

I like the fact that we have this conversation here. I hope that as we transition and move forward, there could be stronger consideration of this. People will say that this would be in 10 years, because currently the Centre Block is undergoing renovations. Is there a way we could possibly do something now or in the near future? I strongly recommend that PROC dive in on the perspective of engaging dual chambers.

I heard members talk about committee of the whole and how significant it was for them. Although sometimes complaining that the government was sitting as a whole, we realize the importance of having great, engaging debate in the House.

• (1655)

[Translation]

My fourth point has to do with time allocation, which was implemented in 1969 to curtail debate as a less draconian alternative to closure. The debate on the motion to implement time allocation was acrimonious, and its use since has been seen rather disdainfully by the opposition and by the media.

Its use by the previous government over 100 times in the 41st Parliament was a clear signal that an alternative was needed. Time allocation disrupts the business of the House, committee work, and cabinet meetings.

Orders of the Day

In reviewing the international landscape, there are a number of legislatures that have implemented alternative ways to manage time for debate in the House. We have talked a lot about the British House of Commons. Since 1998, it has adopted the practice of using programming motions to allocate time for government bills. Programming was introduced on an experimental basis in 1998 and was made permanent in 2004.

For those watching us at home and for hon. members here in the House, this is how it works. Following discussion with House leaders, the government gives notice of a motion following second reading of a bill to allocate a specific number of days or weeks for the committee stage, and the time needed for debate at report stage and third reading. Following the adoption of such a motion, the bill is disposed of according to the terms of the motion.

In 2013, the British Procedure Committee reported on its review of programming and concluded that programming is beneficial to the scrutiny of legislation. Moreover, the official opposition commented favourably in the review on programming and concluded that it had resulted in an appropriate balance between ensuring the opposition had sufficient time to scrutinize legislation and the government to manage its legislative agenda.

[*English*]

The government has an agenda. It is there to govern. Certainly we all want democracy, but the government will have to carry out its agenda. The opposition parties also have their role, which is not to criticize but sometimes bring up aspects on which they disagree with the government.

[*Translation*]

Other observers of parliamentary institutions have accepted—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Orléans, but her time has expired. However, she will have a good five minutes to express herself during questions and comments.

[*English*]

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, while I was reflecting and getting ready to speak, although I do not think I will have time today, I was looking at some speeches from last time around. In 2016, the member for Chilliwack—Hope said, “Parliament is not here to serve us; we are here to serve Parliament and the Canadians who sent us here.” I am reminded of that as we are having this conversation.

As several members are talking about moving away from Fridays, I would argue that Canadians expect their Parliament to sit. I think they want us to have as many opportunities as we can to engage in democracy on their behalf. I wonder if the hon. member views Parliament as an essential service.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Speaker, I see police officers as serving their community. I see many first responders as serving their communities. I represent the community that elected me to represent it here. Overall, my voice here is as equally important to reflect what I hear in my community and having the oppor-

tunity to debate on government or private members' bills from the opposition or my caucus on the Liberal side.

With regard to essential services, throughout the summer last year during the pandemic, we saw the need to continue to find ways to help Canadians. I certainly appreciated all the help, collectively, to support Canadians.

● (1700)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been listening with great interest to the debate and I am one of the heretics on most of the ideas being suggested. In particular, the hon. member raised the idea of eliminating Fridays and lengthening the sitting days in the rest of the week. As a member from Vancouver Island, I do not think eliminating Fridays does anything productive for those who represent ridings farther away.

I wonder if the member considered all the other things that take place on Parliament Hill, such as meeting with delegations and constituents who come to Ottawa. If we eliminate Fridays and lengthen the other days, it would make MPs far less accessible.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Speaker, for me, not sitting on Fridays as a tradition being set does not mean we cannot find other ways. We could possibly have a dual chamber where we could have more engaging debate. I am in Orleans, so I guess my sensitivity is for many members who are far away and need to travel. Representing are members is also being part of our communities.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I, for one, really miss being in the House of Commons as I work from home in Nanaimo—Ladysmith, but I do see the value in electronic voting. My father, who was a member of Parliament, said that some MPs would drag themselves from their sick beds, those dealing with cancer, heart disease and other things, to get to the House of Commons to vote. There are things we can take from what we have done with the hybrid Parliament to facilitate the health of members of Parliament and lower our greenhouse gas footprint for those flying back and forth the way we do from the west coast. I would like the member's comments on that.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I will be very quick, Madam Speaker. I very much agree with my colleague.

Orders of the Day

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very interested in this particular debate, because I have never gone through this before. I used to be an MNA in Quebec City, and there was no way to speak openly about proposals and amendments aimed at making parliamentary work more firmly rooted in the values of democracy that everyone seeks to defend. I want to make three very simple suggestions.

First of all, my colleague from Saint-Jean suggested something in her speech that I thought was very interesting, and I want to pick up on that. Friday could be a special day. Instead of the usual schedule, we could simply question two ministers, as we did during the special committee on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Between 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., these discussions could take up to five minutes and include questions and answers of equal length. Since there are approximately 26 ministers and 26 weeks of parliamentary business, each minister would have his or her “required” turn. However, this should not be seen as arm-twisting. This would be about going over the ministers' main portfolios and asking them questions. Ministers could then tell us how they see the current and future situations and defend the government's positions. This would be very good for both sides of the House.

Then from noon until 1:30 p.m., after Oral Questions, we would question a minister chosen by the House leaders. This minister could come back a few times throughout the year, depending on the economic news. In the current situation, we would likely want to hear from the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance. Rather than asking questions and seeking answers in the oral question period format, we would have time to express our views, ask questions and hope for answers while engaging in a dialogue with the ministers to get to the bottom of things.

This is a similar model to the one used at the Parliament of Quebec, and it is referred to as an interpellation. A minister is chosen and is asked questions for two hours. This allows members to delve deeper into issues and to better understand the policies of the department and the minister in question. I find this to be a useful practice.

We could learn a lot from other parliaments. I have had the opportunity of working in Quebec City and now in Ottawa. My colleague from Orléans has mentioned that she was once an MPP in Ontario. It might be worth seeing how things are done elsewhere and drawing from those examples.

There was a lot of talk about prorogation this summer. This summer's extraordinary circumstances were terrible. Prorogation, during which Parliament is shut down, is a tool that is often, or mainly, used for political reasons. Some might say that it is always used as such, but I am not a historian.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and we are studying this issue. Was this summer's prorogation what it was meant to be? Technically, prorogation refers to putting an end to a parliamentary session and starting from scratch. Normally, a government prorogues Parliament in response to extraordinary circumstances, because it wants to start fresh and

send a clear message to people that the government is taking a new, or maybe even better, tack. The point of prorogation is to reset the clock, and there needs to be a clean break. That is how it is supposed to work.

● (1705)

That is why, when the government prorogued Parliament in August, everyone was expecting a lot of changes in the throne speech. That is what people want.

All kinds of theories emerged about why the Liberals prorogued Parliament: there were not enough differences between what was happening before prorogation and the government's throne speech; the WE affair put the government in an awkward position and people were saying the government was trying to put a lid on it; and so on.

I am not trying to play politics, and my colleagues know what I am talking about. We could go on and on about this. I know everyone here has already made up their mind. I am not going to keep talking about this, but my point is that we can change how we do things.

Right now, if a government wants to prorogue, it prorogues. It goes to the Governor General, when there is one, and says it is going to prorogue Parliament. The Governor General's job is to say fine, okay, unless the government is facing a confidence vote, which was the case in 2008 with the Harper government.

In this particular case, when a confidence motion is moved, the Governor General has the right not to be bound to the Prime Minister by telling him that he does not have, or does not appear to have, the confidence of his Parliament because a motion has been moved. The Governor General therefore has the freedom to choose whether he or she has confidence or not.

Personally, as the member for La Prairie and a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I listened very carefully to Hugo Cyr, who really enlightened us with his vast knowledge. I would suggest that if the government wants to prorogue Parliament and wants to bind the Governor General to that prorogation, it must have the confidence of Parliament.

In the case where the government says it wants to prorogue Parliament, in the situation we are currently in, if we want to change how things are done, the government should have to ask the members of the House if they agree to prorogue Parliament. That should be a matter of debate.

If the House agrees and says yes, the Prime Minister goes before the Governor General and he or she would be bound by the will to prorogue Parliament. That way, our current Prime Minister could have said in August that he wanted to prorogue Parliament and say why. We would have discussed it and agreed or not to vote on whether that specific situation led us to believe that we should prorogue Parliament. That is one way of doing things. We could move forward with Hugo Cyr's suggestion, which I found very interesting.

Orders of the Day

I have one last point to make and it has to do with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. Going before the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is not meant to be a walk in the park and is not supposed to happen often. It is supposed to be as rare as seeing a kangaroo on a trampoline. It is rare to see that, but the Prime Minister has been before the commissioner three times. He is on a first-name basis with him. That can only mean that the consequences are not significant enough and at most he gets a slap on the wrist, that is all. It is not enough punishment.

The Ethics Commissioner needs more power so that elected officials, regardless of who, never want to have to appear before him again and so that they understand that appearing before the commissioner is not a pleasant experience. That way, we can guarantee that MPs will be more careful about following the rules because more serious sanctions could be imposed on them by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, who will have the power to take more aggressive action.

That is another suggestion that I wanted to make. I am not trying to rewrite history or play politics. However, we know that the Prime Minister has appeared before the Ethics Commissioner three times. He was reprimanded twice and is going back again a third time. Eventually, it begins to seem as though appearing before the Ethics Commissioner really is not as bad as all that. I therefore think that we should give the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner more power. With that, I will conclude my speech.

• (1710)

[*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, my question is with regard to Fridays. Every 10 years or so, the number of MPs in the House of Commons increases, yet the amount of time available for debate continues, in my opinion, to diminish.

When the member talks about Fridays and alternative uses, to what degree would he support ensuring that members of Parliament have more opportunity to debate legislative measures, whether they are with respect to the government or to private members' hour? Would he support enhancing Fridays to ensure that this takes place?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is right. If our suggestions for Fridays were implemented, it would mean less time for debating bills. However, I would like to remind him that, when we ask ministers questions, we are doing our job as legislators and as parliamentarians. We are doing the job that we were elected to do and the job that voters expect us to do. It is not a waste of time. That being said, we could make up for the time spent talking to ministers by moving those missing hours to other times during the week.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his intervention. I would like to add that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta was prorogued five times between 2015 and 2019. We are not known for proroguing, but the provincial government does use this tool almost every year, unlike the other jurisdictions in Canada.

I would comment that I like what the member is proposing for Fridays. We could extend Friday's oral question period as we did during meetings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic. In committee of the whole, we had five minutes to ask a minister several questions to have a real exchange and a real debate. This would be a better formula for debate and for getting answers to our questions on Friday.

• (1715)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to say that my colleague speaks outstanding French. Every time I listen to him, I am extremely impressed and I enjoy his excellent spoken French. I believe compliments are in order, in the circumstances.

My colleague agrees with us that we should hold such debates on Fridays. I think it would benefit everyone and that it would not be advantageous just for the opposition. This summer, when we sat in committee of the whole, we noted that ministers generally did well, answered questions, made clear arguments and that we could learn more than we do in question period.

I am convinced that if we asked certain ministers, they would say that they liked the formula because it gave them the time to better explain their positions and their actions so that people could understand the objective of the policies put in place. Why not use that formula?

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to quickly continue with the comments around Fridays.

I am very much in favour of keeping Friday sittings. In fact, I would be happy if they were extended to full days, especially if that would mean we would not be sitting longer during the week. I think our weekday sittings are long enough as it is.

I think I am open to changing them somewhat. Maybe we could have two private members' business slots or a longer question period but still keep time for government orders so that would move smoothly. If it was a hybrid session, a lot of those people who have gone home could take part as well.

I just want to let him expand on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, my answer will be brief.

We are discussing things, making suggestions, and figuring out what would be best for everyone. Changes should be put to a vote and adopted by the majority. Obviously, not everyone will agree with my position or my colleague's. That is what debate is for. We discuss things and then decide by majority vote.

Orders of the Day

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a real honour to rise today and participate in this debate. I have been listening since the beginning, and one of the reflections I have is about how open this debate has been in terms of people expressing their own opinions. It is quite refreshing to have been part of this and to hear what people genuinely think.

People are only really going to participate in this debate if they like procedure and like talking about how the House works. It is very clear that people's discussions today are coming from their own perspectives and their own ideas. In the same way, I will be sharing my opinions based on what I have observed over the last five years, or almost six years now, I guess.

I remember the very first time we had this debate after I was first elected. I took quite an interest in what was being discussed, because it is a unique opportunity to reflect on the way we operate and how we can improve it. I know the legislation enabling this debate to occur is fairly new, at least within the last few decades, and it is a vitally important part of the democratic function of this House. I doubt that a lot of the suggestions coming from here have ever really made headway, but at least we have the place to have this discussion.

A number of people have spoken in favour of electronic voting. I will not get into the details of that and rehash what other people have said, but I want to voice my support for the position that it is time for this House to adopt a form of electronic voting. We would not have to worry about people being able to see people standing in their place, and every vote would be a recorded vote and be put in Hansard. I am not even saying it has to be done in the way we are going to test this evening with remote voting, but just to have the voting capacity at our own individual desks would be good.

What I really want to talk about today is the quality of the debate in this House, and I want to talk about two parts of what goes on in here. I know I talked about this the last time, but it is something I am passionate about, and it actually involves the Speaker's role in this House. The two parts I want to talk about when I address the quality of debate are question period and the normal debate periods, such as the one we are having right now.

There is a problem with the fact that over the last few decades, we have arrived at a point where the Speaker holds a list, whether it is during question period or the regular time for debate. I am sure these changes were made with good intentions, but some consequences have come of them. What has been created is a scenario in which we do not really participate in a debate in terms of listening to what other people say, challenging their ideas and putting forward our own ideas. Instead, we come in here and stand for 10 minutes, give a speech, whether it is written in advance or off the cuff, answer some questions and then leave.

Part of the problem is that the Speaker has a list and is going through the list of who is going to be called and at what time. In this scenario, if I know I want to speak to a certain bill, I then ask my whip's desk to put me on the list. I get on the list and then I am told that I am speaking at approximately 20 after 10, although it depends on whether we get bumped around by votes and stuff. This gives me the ability to say to myself that I am going to be speaking

at 20 after 10, so I will be in the House just shortly after 10 o'clock, and I know I can take a meeting back in my office later on at 11 o'clock because that will give me enough of a buffer. I can kind of plan my day around that. The problem there is that I am not participating in a debate; I am just giving a speech and then answering some questions afterward.

● (1720)

Let us say I was forced to come here to sit and listen, and every time the Speaker said "resuming debate", I would get out of my chair to try to catch his or her eye. I am sure there are ways for the Speaker to ensure fairness in the distribution of turns. However, if I were forced to do that, I would be forced to listen to what other people had to say. Debating is probably more about listening than about what one has to say. Since the 1990s, or whenever the Speaker started to develop these lists, they have been detrimental to the quality of the debate in the House.

I will also bring the following, as it relates to question period. What I have found so refreshing about today's discussion is that it has not been so partisan, and I say this with regard to both sides of the aisle. Quite often the opposition will say that the Liberals are not answering questions, that we are reading pre-programmed answers. I am not going to deny that. I think it has happened when both Conservatives and Liberals have been in power.

I also think that when there is a script for who is going to ask a question, the opposition, in this case who ask the majority of the questions, are also going to become very scripted. For example, the member for Carleton usually asks two or three questions in a row. He will set up his first question. He kind of knows the answer that he is going to get and tees it up for the next one, and then he gets to hit the home run, if he is successful, with the last question he asks. It has become very scripted because he knows he will have three questions at a specific time and that he will be following on the back of another member who had questions that set him up, as well.

In one sense, it is arguable that answers are not being really given to the questions being asked. It is also easy to criticize the questions being asked and the manner in which they are being asked. I genuinely think that if it were a member's role to get the eye of the Speaker and the Speaker said that a certain member had not asked a question in a while and went to that person, without their knowing they would be getting the next question, it would make them know their material so that when they do get up, they are ready. It would eliminate the habit of our writing a question in advance and practising it 20 or 30 times to get the perfect clip. It would also prevent ministers from being prepared because the questions would not be the same every single day in the exact same order. It would really free up the place we have come to where everything is scripted and happening in a certain order. It would improve discourse in this place.

Orders of the Day

We can think about what is most important here. I know there have been a ton of good topics that have come up today, and people have contributed and talked about different ways they think this place could function better. I agree with almost all of them. There are always some details that need to be fine-tuned and for us to really look into things, but it is an opportunity to improve the quality of what goes on here.

The heart of what we do here is debating. It is bringing forward ideas from around the country, from the people we represent, the mandate we think they have given to us to bring here and to represent them here. At the same time, it is not just about coming here and yelling out one's position. It is about listening to the positions of other people from around the country. Having that opportunity to hear what other people have to say and to listen to it, by kind of being forced to listen to it, is so incredibly important.

I have really enjoyed the discussion today. I enjoyed listening to all members in the House and those who have been contributing virtually to the discussion. It has been very rewarding to hear their personal opinions on this, and not their partisan takes on it.

● (1725)

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. member that the reason the member for Carleton is so effective in his approach is that he knows exactly what the scripted Liberal ministers' responses are going to be.

I did listen carefully and I liked where he was going in terms of the debate. It is rare I find some common ground with the member, but I have been thinking about an idea, of getting 30-minute spans of time, including the Q and A. We could break it down into two sometimes.

I would like to throw out another idea for discussion. What if we allowed to break up more of the time into maybe three speeches instead of two, and what if we allowed more Q and A time and a bit less speech time so that we could have more of the back and forth that the member talks about. I think he was on a good track and I want to hear his thoughts on that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I personally think that would be beneficial. Someone else mentioned having the option of doing a five-minute speech and 10 minutes of questions and answers. A member across the way talked about yielding one's time and bringing it back. I totally agree with that.

If I only have two minutes of material, why do I need to stand here for 10 minutes to fill an additional eight minutes of time? Why can I not let discussion happen during that time otherwise? Obviously, the devil is in the details and we would want to look into the particulars of it. To the member's point, I am totally open to the idea of changing that in order to be more flexible.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is more of a comment, because my colleague did not mention it during his speech. I just want to amplify what the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith and the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke said about elimination of Friday sittings.

There is a misconception among members, especially those from Ontario and Quebec, who are close to Ottawa that getting rid of Friday sittings would help those of us who represent far-flung ridings. It is really quite the opposite. If we got rid of Friday sittings and I were working in Ottawa on Thursday, I would not get home until Friday afternoon. I would have Saturday in the riding, and then I would have to leave Sunday morning to come back for Monday. If I am going to stay in Ottawa for the weekend, I would rather have Fridays as a full working day when we could get something done, and especially not extend sittings during the week.

● (1730)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I totally agree. My father was in the provincial legislature in Ontario and he did not sit at home on Fridays and do nothing. He was in his constituency office meeting with stakeholders, doing important work and preparing. I totally see the benefit, from what this member is suggesting. He is absolutely right.

My seatmate in the previous session of Parliament was from Kelowna. From the stories he would tell me about how long it would take him to get home, in order to do these things a member's whole weekend is totally blown. Especially in regard to being family-friendly, I do not have any problem with that personally.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I know that the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is very concerned about climate and our carbon footprints. I have been advancing for some years the idea that our Parliament should work three weeks on, three weeks off. I call it the "Fort Mac work schedule". We would be able to work right through Friday and half a day Saturday, so that none of our constituents or Canadians would think we were working fewer hours. We could get a lot more done, and our constituents would reliably know that we would be home for three weeks working in the constituency. I ask for the member's comments.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I certainly appreciate where the member is going, Madam Speaker. I drove here in an electric car and will drive home. I hope that is minimizing my footprint as much as possible. I am reluctant to weigh in on three weeks of being away from my two-year-old, my four-year-old and my 15-year-old. However, I know where the member is going with this, and looking for solutions like that could definitely benefit our environment. Anything that we can do warrants discussion.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to talk about the Standing Orders. This is always a debate that I very much enjoy.

Orders of the Day

The rules of the House govern how we do our work in the House of Commons, and so, before we talk about the rules and how we might want to change them, I think it is important to talk about why we have these rules and what we are hoping to achieve with them. I would offer that the rules are there to help us create an environment where we have a professional, respectful discourse that promotes efficient work, such as on bills and on all of the statements and petitions and all of the other work the House does, and also so that we can represent our ridings from across the country. That is why we have come here.

Why should members listen to me about what I think we ought to do in the House? I am a valued member of the House, so that is one reason, but I would say I have a few credentials that they may want to consider. The first is that twice in the last six years I have been voted the most collegial parliamentarian, so I think I know something about being professional and respectful and working co-operatively.

The other thing members might want to consider is that I am the first female engineer in the House of Commons. Engineers are all about efficiency, and in my 32-year career I spent a lot of time talking about work processes, the efficiency or work processes and how to change work processes. In fact, when we had the last debate under S. O. 51s and I gave my speech with all of my ideas, the late Arnold Chan actually came across the aisle and said to me that I had a lot of really good ideas and asked if he could have a copy of my speech. I am pleased to say that a couple of the ideas I offered have actually started to happen in reality. One of them was that in order to be family-friendly, we should be holding most of our votes after question period. I see that in most cases, that is what we are doing. I also suggested that we should be doing electronic voting. I suggested that in 2015. Here we are, and it is happening, and so I would offer the rest of my suggestions to the House, not in any particular order of priority, but as different ideas that I think might help improve the work here.

The first has to do with our S. O. 31s. I really enjoy hearing from members when they honour their constituents, paying tribute to someone who has passed away, for example, or even when the member does do infomercials for their parties. I think these are all good, but I notice that not everybody really gets a chance to do them as often as they should, and so I think we should apply the same kind of lottery that we do for Private Members' Business. We should let it be a second lottery, so that if a member loses out and is late in the game on Private Members' Business, maybe they can be earlier in the game on S. O. 31s. Then we just continue to roll over the list in that order, so that everybody from ridings across the country has a chance to make their statements and make an impact.

Second, I notice that when we come to second reading and there is unanimous consent for a bill, we send the bill to committee and then it comes back here for report stage and third reading. If we unanimously agree at second reading, let us send it off to the Senate and call it a day. We all agree. Let us shorten the time to get some of this legislation in place. I think that would be beneficial. Then we could have more discussion of new bills.

Another point is on the dress code in the House. There was some discussion earlier about the dress code. One of the things, as a menopausal woman, that I have appreciated is that women are able

to bare our arms in the House. We have the right to bare our arms, one might say. However, for my male colleagues, I have seen them when it is hot in the House and they are forced to wear their jackets. It is quite uncomfortable for them. Perhaps we should be setting a dress code in the summer that allows them to wear short sleeves, but a tie, so we are still maintaining decorum but are all comfortable, so that we can participate in and endure the discussion.

In terms of hours, private members' bills are very important. As somebody who passed a private member's bill on palliative care to get consistent access to such care for all Canadians, I can tell members that it was a real thrill. I think it was valuable to the country.

• (1735)

There are a lot of great ideas from all parties on Private Members' Business, but not everybody will get a chance to do that. However, we could alter the way we do hours in the House to try to double up the amount of time we have for Private Members' Business.

For example, we could decide to start from Monday to Friday at 9 a.m., which regular business does, and devote that extra time to Private Members' Business. We could have a few extra hours on Monday and an extra hour Tuesday. We could maybe start at 1 p.m. on Wednesday to have another hour and then another on Thursday and Friday. We could double the time for Private Members' Business, which would help everybody in a parliamentary session get through and contribute his or her private member's bill. That would be a great improvement for the House.

We talked about having votes after QP whenever possible. However, one thing to consider is the elimination of the all-night voting, especially for members who have medical issues, or who are seniors or for our families. Extending the hours to 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. gets the point across for the media to pick up that there is an issue that the opposition wants to bring forward, but we really do not need to torture ourselves all night.

There was some commentary on how maybe 10 or 20 minutes was not the right time frame for speeches in the House.

Orders of the Day

When I was first elected, I was asked if I could speak for some time on the withdrawal of the CF-18s from the ISIS fight. I said that I could do a couple of minutes on that, but I was told I had 10 or 20 minutes on the subject. I said I could say everything I had to say in two minutes, but that was not the way we did things. I ended up putting eight minutes of filler into the two minutes of what I really wanted to say. As I sit in the House and listen to other members, a lot of filler happens that does not need to happen. I would encourage breaking it up in some way so we would either have two five-minute speeches with the five minutes of questions to either one of them or allow the flexibility.

I really enjoyed the COVID sessions we had this summer. We had five minutes of questions in question period. I thought the quality of questions was better with respect to getting very specific and the answers were better, which was a good thing for our discourse.

Also, I would like to hear questions being answered. The standard talking points is a disservice to Canadians, especially when people do not answer the questions at all and move on to a different topic. That is not good.

When a lot of issues are going on and time is short, a lot of people do not even hear one speech on the issue before it shows up at the committee for consideration. I would rather see each party come with two or three speakers who have the diversity of thought from their caucus and have everybody sit in the House and listen to all of it so we all understand the issues before it shows up at committee. That would really help with the debate.

We also need to have better respect for one another. We have talked about heckling. I am not a fan of heckling, although I like the idea of intelligent heckling in the written comments. However, in general, we should not be talking when other people are talking. We should be treating our colleagues with respect. There should not be bullying, piling on and insulting going on. This is not helpful to the discourse of the House and it is not helpful to any of us.

On Questions on the Order Paper, every day, the government House leader gets up and asks that the remaining questions be allowed to stand. I have only been here for six years, but I have never heard anyone say no. We should strike that inefficiency. The question should always be allowed to stand.

I liked the idea of the late show questions answered by parliamentary secretaries. We should include all the rules of a pandemic sitting in the Standing Orders. I have more recommendations, but my time is up.

• (1740)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope everyone can hear me this time.

Congratulations to the member for a very thoughtful speech. She mentioned private members' bills. I have a comment and then a question.

As I said earlier, if we had a parallel house or second House of Commons as they do in Britain and Australia, we could work on many more private members' bills.

My question relates to this. A lot of private members' bills do not go very far. One reason is that they have not been scrutinized by bureaucratic experts. No matter which party is in power, a lot of government bills are fixed or do not go forward because of the experts, who have spent their entire lives on that topic, weighing in and at least giving their opinion.

Does the member think that a way to have more private members' bills go through would be getting expert opinions, or further information, on the bills from a relevant department's experts who have spent their lives studying the issues?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, when my private member's bill passed, I was surprised to find that fewer than 300 people had ever passed one in the House. I think there is not enough training, especially for new members, to understand that the legislative clerks have to check all of the other bills and acts in the House to make sure that everything is allowable and everything is in the bill that needs to be.

I think maybe lessons for the newbies on how to do a private member's bill might be very good.

• (1745)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, during her first speech the member showed us that if we are speaking from our offices we should always have our hands moving and speak with our hands to set off the motion sensors and keep the lights from going off in our offices. She brought up a lot of really good points and a lot of things that should be considered. She spoke about the culture of Parliament and how we do our business here, so I want to hear her thoughts on this.

There used to be a practice in the House that, during an opposition supply day, the minister responsible for the file would sit through the whole debate and sometimes participate in it. I know of one Harper-era minister who did this consistently on immigration issues. It actually convinced opposition parties not to do it as often on his particular files.

What does the member think of that? It does not need to be a Standing Order change, but perhaps bring back a tradition that has fallen by the wayside over the years.

Orders of the Day

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I think that if we respect the work that is being done here in the House, if an opposition day motion is brought up on a subject under a minister's control, that that minister should want to hear about the issue. Do they have to be here the whole day? Some representative, either the minister or their parliamentary secretary, should definitely be here to hear the full comments that are made, so that they can address the concerns raised.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know there has been a little bit of talk about heckling today and how we might be able to do it better, get rid of it or replace it. In some other legislatures, they have a procedure by which members can indicate they would like to interject with a brief question or comment. The person who is speaking can choose whether that person may stand up briefly during their time and offer a question or comment, or whether they are not ready for that. If they are in full rhetorical swing, they might decline that option.

Even on the floor of the House, there are ways that we could do a better job of fulfilling the important function that heckling sometime plays, without the negative consequences. I wonder if the member might have some comments on that.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, intelligent heckling with intelligent points would be good, especially when we have seen over time that the practice of the House is not to mislead Canadians: not to lie.

That is why it was improper, during parliamentary procedure, to say that someone was lying. It was built on the premise that someone was not going to lie. I have seen a big departure from that. Intelligent heckling is calling people to account when they are misleading Canadians or not presenting the facts. I would love to have a fact checker in the House of Commons.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to take the floor today to speak to many issues that I am very passionate about. As the hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame mentioned earlier, we are on something called a democracy caucus and there are a number of us who are very passionate, including the member for Elmwood—Transcona, among others, and we want to see our rules reflect what Canadians most want.

I believe that Canadians most want a Parliament where we show respect for each other, as we do in real life when we are not fomenting a lot of rage for the cameras. I thank the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton for her role as being the most congenial over and over again. I think, as a group, we are actually quite congenial, and I think Canadians would like to see more of that.

I reflect very much on the reality of our principles. Westminster parliamentary democracy is based on the principle that all members of Parliament are equal. Each of us equal to the other, and the Prime Minister is merely first among equals. I set those principles against a finding within a 2008 report from Queen's University in Kingston, the Centre for the Study of Democracy and Diversity, which concluded that our Parliament has become “executive-centred, party-dominated and adversarial”. I do not think that is what Canadians want, and it is not our parliamentary tradition. It comes

from a number of trends which are disturbing. Our Standing Orders can be used to reverse those trends.

First, I want to focus on a couple of the big issues. Then I hope I will have enough time to get to some of the other ones. The first big issue before us is that we are speaking on Zoom. Who would have thought it a year ago? Our Parliament is assembling virtually and our speaker is in the chair wearing her mask. These are all new innovations in response to a pandemic.

I would like to propose that, when our recommendations from today's debate go to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, it give serious consideration to creating a set of Standing Orders for use in public health emergencies. Whether it is a pandemic, or some other event that prevents us from meeting in person, we would be able to meet virtually. We should preserve the Standing Orders that work best through this period and continue to use them.

In relation to distance voting, we should not have distance voting except under particular circumstances. I say this because I have seen too often colleagues who have come literally from their deathbeds to a vote in the House. I know some members have suggested vote pairing would do it. That would not have worked in the case of the late hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, Mauril Bélanger. If he had not personally come into the House in order to vote, his private member's bill would have died because of procedural shenanigans.

I think of the Conservative member from Orléans, the late Royal Galipeau. In specific circumstances, very narrowly related to people dealing with an illness that requires them to be hospitalized, at their option, members should be able to vote virtually. Otherwise, we should be in Parliament. Whether we do electronic voting from our desks to speed things up, which is a possibility the hon. member for Yukon has proposed and so has the member for Sarnia—Lambton, I do not think it should be normal that we vote at distance. Being together in the House really matters to the business of democracy. It definitely helps us to be more collegial when we can have hallway conversations and are not just chatting over Zoom.

The second big change in our Standing Orders that I would like to see, and it is a strong concern of the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, is the question of the confidence convention, or when we prorogue and when the House is able to end. We ought to look at the advice from two strong political scientists in this country, Professor Hugo Cyr from Montreal and Professor Emeritus Peter Russell from the University of Toronto. Both have forcefully suggested to the House on different occasions that no Prime Minister should be able to go to the Governor General to ask to dissolve the House without first obtaining approval from the House of Commons by a vote of the House.

Orders of the Day

As well, there is something that I hope that the procedure and House affairs will look into, which is called the constructive non-confidence vote. It has been advanced by both Professor Hugo Cyr and Professor Peter Russell. This would allow us, as is possible in Germany, Spain and Sweden, for example, to actually put forward a government as defeated, but with a government to put in its place, so that every confidence vote that is lost does not lead automatically to an election. An election is avoided if a combination of parties in the House can put together a functional government in the view of a Governor General.

• (1750)

Some issues relating to decorum and respect for each other in the House do not require changing Standing Orders. I just want to flag that some of the issues we have discussed today are actually amenable to being resolved without changing the Standing Orders.

Our Standing Orders still say that no member of Parliament can read a speech. Regarding canned speeches, presenting a 10-minute speech with five minutes of questions and answers does not really allow us to engage in debate with each other. If, as some members have agreed, we should be able to speak from a handful of notes but not a prepared speech word for word, it would engage members in discussion.

It would also keep the list of speakers available to speak to legislation, about which we may all be in violent agreement, to a very low number. If a party backroom could not decide, it could put up an endless number of speeches and keep the government off balance, not telling the government how much time it would need for them.

Another area that does not require a change in the Standing Orders is a practice in Canada that is unique among all the Commonwealth nations that use the system of Westminster parliamentary democracy, in which the Speaker surrenders his or her ability to choose who speaks next during Question Period to the party whip. It has an interesting history that goes back to former Speaker Jeanne Sauv  saying she had trouble seeing people at the end of the Chamber.

The balance of power in that situation shifts from members of Parliament wanting to make the Speaker pleased with how they behave in the House to making their party whip pleased with how they behave in the House. This tends to increase partisanship, increase party control and reduce decorum.

A very good point made by a number of members, including the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, is that we should look at what is done in the U.K. Parliament, in London, where a member can cede the floor to another member who is rising. This is a really good practice, but it would not work under our current Standing Orders. We would have to change the Standing Orders to make this work. Right now nobody can speak unless our Speaker calls the hon. member for a named riding.

In Parliament at Westminster, the Speaker decides who asks questions of the Prime Minister through letters that are sent to the Speaker's office. Once the Speaker has given the floor to an hon. member, and I will use the example of the member for Brighton Pavilion because she is the only Green Party member, that speaker

then has 20 minutes, or however long, to speak. Within that period of time, she can yield the floor to someone else who is rising. The Speaker in the Chamber can be chatting with someone else off to the side, because the time is allotted to that speaker. I have observed this.

They are engaged in discussion and debate, and because they are not using canned speeches, as the reading of speeches is prohibited in the U.K. Parliament, quite often they cede the floor to a friendly questioner, or an unfriendly questioner. It gives the speaker a chance to have a sip of water. The discussion is interesting, it is engaging, and the citizens of the U.K. get to experience a more engaged, informed and interesting parliamentary exchange than what we have with canned speeches and the inability to yield the floor to anyone until our time is up.

I have raised a lot of other concerns briefly today in the House. It is an unanswerable question. How do we organize ourselves in a country as vast as Canada? Some of us, such as the hon. member for Yukon, have the world's worst schedule. Full praise to the member. I have at least two flights, and when we are not holding virtual sittings because of COVID, I am travelling back and forth every week. I live in a state of perpetual exhaustion and jet lag.

How do we fix this so that those people who have young children can be home with their children? Can we reduce greenhouse gases? We have saved the people of Canada millions of dollars this year by working on Zoom. Can we figure out a way to change our schedule to better accommodate our carbon footprint and the livability of the schedules of MPs who also have families?

With that, I look forward to questions.

• (1755)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with the vast majority of what my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands is saying, even to the point that I have accepted the notion of this Fort McMurray turnaround for parliamentarians that goes three weeks on and three weeks off. I did not in the beginning, until we struck up a conversation and I realized she speaks quite a bit of truth there.

I want to get her opinion on what we discussed earlier about a parallel chamber.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, it is increasingly attractive because of the structural changes that have been made in this place. When we finally re-enter Centre Block, we will in fact have two chambers. I certainly support members who have said we need updates, and members sitting currently should know something about what is going on with the changes being made over there. The possibility of accelerating debates, hearing more private members' business and having two physical chambers within about 10 years is more attractive now than when it was hypothetical. I note that former member Frank Baylis did a lot of work in promoting this, and many of us signed on to that proposal in the previous Parliament.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, out of deference to my friend's interpretation of the rules, I did not heckle at all while she was speaking.

I very much agree with her comments about the Speaker retaining control over recognition. Although that is the rule, it is just an issue of party lists. It is not so much an issue of the rules as it is the practices of the House.

I agree with her about the issue of interjection. I recall, after one long day in Parliament, going home and watching Jacob Rees-Mogg and Rory Stewart debate the nature of human rights. I thought this is how Parliament should be: two members of the same party intervening to have a very deep back-and-forth about substantive questions on the origin and nature of human rights.

I want to ask the member about issues around prorogation. She proposes a procedure for prorogation, and some of it may come from the coalition crisis we had in late 2008 and early 2009. I observe that at that time, the reason we did not have a different government was not so much prorogation. It was because at the end of the day the Liberals backed down. Michael Ignatieff decided not to proceed. A lot of that was because of strong public pressure not to proceed, so it was not really—

• (1800)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Could members ask their questions so other members also have an opportunity to do so?

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, for the confidence conventions, I am not making recommendations based on any one episode, but one question remains: When should the Prime Minister be able to put forward a vote for prorogation?

We could make the same argument for this summer as we would have four years ago. The idea is that it is for a reset. That is why we prorogue. There are normal prorogations that are completely part of our parliamentary convention and I would never object to them. However, if the government cannot carry the confidence of the House after saying we need a restart and that it has done the work outlined in the Speech from the Throne, then I do not believe a prime minister should be able to go to the Governor General to prorogue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am really glad my colleague pointed out in her speech that, too often, unfortunately, some of our colleagues read speeches.

I am not complaining. It is just something I notice a lot. We are expected to be experts on everything. One day we are talking about natural resources, and the next we are talking about international affairs. Unfortunately, we talk about everything superficially and never talk about anything in depth.

I agree with her, and I think we would have deeper discussions if we asked members to really think for themselves and not just read speeches written by assistants. All too often, that gives everyone a false impression of the debates we have here.

Does my colleague agree with me?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague from Jonquière and I thank him.

Debates certainly touch on a lot of subjects. I myself have never delivered a speech written by someone else. I always express my own ideas and use my own notes.

Reading speeches written by others is not real debate.

[*English*]

It like a bad high school play; it really ought to end.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I hope no member will feel I am playing the role in a bad high school play, as somebody who is not in the habit of reading canned speeches anyway.

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in some debate on the Standing Orders in the House. Often, these things are dismissed too quickly as being the wheelhouse of procedural wonks and we often fail to recognize the extent to which these rules really do affect outcomes in the House of Commons.

Sometimes those things flare up and we have moments where people are more appreciative of how the rules of the House affect the business of the nation. In between, we often do not pay them very much regard.

I know Madam Chair will appreciate some of that, having been a part of the studies of the estimates process we undertook at the government operations and estimates committee in the last Parliament.

I really want to zero in on something, and 10 minutes is not a very long time and there is a lot to discuss. However, partly because it is very germane to this Parliament, and any minority Parliament, I want to take time to talk about the confidence convention and some opportunities for us to make a difference when it comes to that.

It is a long-standing prerogative of the Crown to dissolve Parliament whenever he or she sees fit. In Canada, that has really come to mean that the Prime Minister gets to dissolve Parliament when he sees fit, and with one short exception, it is pretty much always been a he. When we talk about the different roles and aspects that our government plays, this is really a place where the legislature, the House of Commons particularly, ought to have more say. I am not talking about the unelected other place in this instance. Canadians' elected representatives ought to have more say about when a Parliament ceases to work. I do not think that is a decision of the Prime Minister.

Orders of the Day

If we were to ask a lot of Canadians whether it should be up to the Prime Minister to decide whether he enjoys the confidence of the House of Commons as opposed to having the House of Commons decide whether the Prime Minister enjoys the confidence of the House of Commons, I think we would find that a lot of Canadians agree it makes more sense that the House decide that question. However, that is not the way our system works.

I have done a bit of work on this. As some members may know, the NDP tabled a supply motion in my name in November in order to try to come up with a solution to this problem, at least for now, short of amending legislation. There is the opportunity to try to do some of that work in the Standing Orders. As it stands, a no-confidence motion, or confidence motion, depending how one wants to frame it, could come either from the government as a motion or it could come any day from opposition parties.

The other thing that does not quite make sense is that an opposition party can put a no-confidence motion on the Notice Paper along with any number of motions and we would not know until the day of whether we were debating a motion of confidence or not. As we saw in the fall, we could have what appears to be a pretty simple matter of establishing a committee and the Prime Minister could decide the same day that it would be a confidence motion.

It really makes sense for democratically elected members of Parliament to have more say on whether the House of Commons has confidence in the government. Also, instead of the kind of gamesmanship that the current rules allow, if there were to be a confidence vote, members from more than one political party ought to be movers of that motion. There should be some agreement across party lines. Members should know days out whether there will be a question of confidence voted on by the House of Commons so everybody has time to prepare and to show up. I do not think these things should be done flying by the seat of our pants.

I encourage members to take a look at the proposal that was tabled then and I hope that by virtue of this interjection along with that from the member Saanich—Gulf Islands this will be sufficient for the procedure and House affairs committee to take up this issue as part of its study. Along with it, I would hope that it would look at the similar prerogative of the Crown whereby the Prime Minister is able to prorogue Parliament. There has been some discussion on that point.

● (1805)

I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for having raised that point, because it is something that we really ought to be looking at. She is quite right to say that there are uses for prorogation, although we have not seen any in a long time. I just wrote “prorogation” where the government is updating the agenda for a parliamentary session, but what we are all concerned about are the instances of political abuse of that power. One of the ways to prevent that abuse is not by discussing the reasons after it is already done, but by implicating legislators up front so that they have some say about the appropriateness of a prorogation before it transpires, and there are ways to do that.

Hugo Cyr has already been mentioned in this debate. He talks about having a rule that deems the Prime Minister to have lost the confidence of the House if he seeks a prorogation without its per-

mission. What that means is that because the Governor General is only obligated to follow the advice of a prime minister who enjoys the confidence of the House, if he is deemed to have lost that confidence, it does not tie the Governor General's hands in the same way. That is something that certainly bears consideration.

I mentioned the estimates. I think the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, either itself or in consultation with another committee, particularly the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, should be examining how to take up the project of estimates reform. Some things were tried in the last Parliament. Some of those went well and some of them really did not, I have to say. It is no secret to members who were here in the last Parliament that I hold that view, but it was a good project and we should be endeavouring to learn whatever lessons we can from that experiment. Despite the fact that there are very concrete timelines governing when the estimates have to be brought to the House, the estimates were deferred when we saw the country in crisis, and Parliament agreed with that deferral.

One of the reasons the government presented consistently in the last Parliament for not having a fixed budget day, which would allow a proper alignment between the budget and the estimates, was that sometimes crises happen, and then the government's hands cannot be tied to present a budget at a specific time. We saw that in a crisis, Parliament is quite prepared to work collaboratively with government to bend some of those rules when it is in the country's interest, and we can reasonably expect that this Parliament would have been willing to do that for a budget, at least to a point. There are some legitimate arguments to be made about whether the government ought to have presented an economic statement or budget sooner than it did, but Parliament has demonstrated that it is reasonable on this point and that if the government does not meet the deadline because there is a genuine crisis, parliamentarians are willing to work with the government in that case.

We should be asking that question about a fixed budget date again, because we need to do something to get the budget cycle and the estimates cycle into alignment so that parliamentarians have a better idea of what they are studying and what the financial implications of it really are. In the current mode, even in the last Parliament, we were not there, and now that we have gone back to the rules that obtained before the last Parliament, we are very far away from having a well-functioning estimates process that Canadians and their elected representatives can understand.

On the question of a second chamber, I would say I quite like the new chamber. I would be happy to spend more time in it if folks in Elmwood—Transcona are gracious enough to give me the opportunity to continue serving them, but I would much rather see, when we go back to Centre Block, a second chamber established in the red chamber after the abolition of the Senate, which I think would be a wonderful thing to see. It would go a long way toward making Canada a true democracy in the 21st century.

Orders of the Day

Of course, we cannot speak to the rules of the Senate here, but what we can speak to is what I think has been a real travesty, something we saw in the last Parliament with a bill that would recognize and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We saw procedural shenanigans tie that bill up in a way that, as far as I am concerned, was completely inappropriate, given that it had the blessing of Canada's elected representatives. Reforming the other place is required, and as the House that actually represents Canadians by virtue of their choices and not prime ministerial patronage, it is important that we undertake to do whatever we can as a House to assert our will over theirs.

• (1810)

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank all of my hon. colleagues for their very interesting comments and ideas. I have heard a lot of good things, and some things I would disagree with as well.

I would like to ask the hon. colleague his opinion on making Parliament more family-friendly for young people who want to run for office, and in particular for women who have children when it is so difficult to be far away from them if they do not live in the area around Parliament.

I would also like to know what his opinion is about keeping some of the virtual Parliament even after COVID-19 has passed.

Also, what is his opinion about the dress code, regarding men for instance? As the member for Sarnia—Lambton mentioned, in this day and age, even in business, men are somewhat less dressed with ties and suits when it is very hot, and things like that—

• (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, but I have to allow the member to answer and have other members ask questions.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I am satisfied with the dress code for men and would prefer that we spend our time and energy on other kinds of reform.

The biggest thing that we could do, particularly for young mothers, and also for MPs with young families in general, does not have to do with the Standing Orders. It has to do with having a proper day care that is accessible, not to just members but also staff on the Hill who may well have young families, and not just political staff but House staff as well. I do not think the House of Commons is where it needs to be in delivering reliable child care for the people who work all sorts of hours to make sure that Canada's democracy works. That is something I would like to see the House administration pursue with serious vigour until it succeeds, because it has not succeeded yet. That would do a lot, not just for MPs but also for all of the staff who animate our democracy here on the Hill.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of talk today about things like scripting and non-answers, and attire. I would even put decorum in that category to some extent. I question who should be the arbiter of these things. It is difficult to police a lot of these things. I would make an argument that, with our House of Commons broadcast, everything is available for constituents to see and that we can all share

on social media what we see. When possible, I would like to leave it up to the public to hopefully get more engaged and watch, and then make their assessment at election time.

I wish I had more time to debate this with everybody, but I wonder if the member could give his thoughts on that.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I would tend to echo some of the remarks we have heard about the fact we do not need to change the rules as much as we need to change the culture. I would like to see more activist Speakers who have a better conception of how debates should be unfolding in the House, who really take unto themselves the powers that are already conferred on the Speaker under the Standing Orders. That can make a real difference.

I was not in the House at the time, but I have it on good authority from a number of members and former members that from 2006 to 2008 we had a deputy Speaker in the chair sometimes who was pretty good at bringing things to heel when the need arose. With the right attitude, a Speaker can do a lot under the existing rules.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech, in which he talked about the Senate.

There is no need to poll my colleagues to find out what we think about that institution. My colleague mentioned that we should perhaps reassess the Senate's role. Does he not think that the Senate should be abolished? What role does he think the Senate should play in the current context? He raised the issue in his speech, but I would like him to elaborate.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, in my opinion, a chamber made up of non-elected officials does not have a very big role to play in democracy. It is as simple as that. However, the Senate does provide regional representation, so we should think about a way to maintain that role in an elected chamber.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, it really is a great pleasure to be joining today's debate, and I have been listening with interest to the contributions from colleagues from all parties. It is a refreshing change from the debate that we are used to. It is great to hear the ideas coming forth, and the fact that so many people are engaged in this debate shows the level of interest.

Orders of the Day

I remember when I was first elected in 2015 and first received a copy of our gigantic *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I enjoyed going through it, and I admit that I was a bit of geek in trying to discover all the rules and procedures by which we operate. They are very much rooted in centuries of use, much of it inherited from the United Kingdom.

I am going to approach today's debate more from the perspective of a member of the opposition. The great Stanley Knowles gave a speech to the Empire Club in 1957. He stated:

It is the opposition's right to insist at all times on the full protection of the rules of debate. The government is entitled to that same protection, but in addition it has its majority with which to establish its will. The opposition has only the rules for its protection, hence the authorities on parliamentary procedure emphasize the greater importance to the opposition of the only protection it has, the protection of the rules.

We, of course, are in a minority situation, but in the last four years during the previous Parliament, the protection of those rules was very important to the members who sat in the opposing benches.

As the first part of my remarks on this debate, one of the things I would like to look at is the amount of time we devote to Private Members' Business. We have one hour scheduled for Private Members' Business each day of the week. For a member of Parliament to introduce a piece of legislation is indeed a huge honour, and I do not think that the government of the day has a monopoly on good ideas. Most of the time in the House, of course, is devoted to Government Orders. If we were to allocate more time for Private Members' Business to allow legislation to come through at a much faster pace, I think that would contribute to giving a lot more equality to the many great ideas that are out there.

For example, in the last Parliament's lottery, I drew the 159th spot. It took four whole years to come up to my turn, and then the House adjourned right before I was scheduled for my first hour of debate. It took us four years in the 42nd Parliament to cover 158 positions. I think that such a pace in examining legislation is far too slow and that we could really benefit by devoting more time to the consideration of Private Members' Business, be it bills or motions. I believe all MPs sitting in our House, not just members of the cabinet, have good ideas to share, and they should be given a full airing.

One other thing I would like to see the procedure and House affairs committee examine is the opportunity for MPs to launch a take-note debate based on the petitions they bring to the House. Former Speakers have agreed that the right of petitioning a Parliament for redress of grievances is certainly one of the fundamental principles of our Constitution. Petitioning the Crown and later Parliament for redress of a grievance originated in 13th century England. That is how old this practice is.

As it stands, MPs are allowed to have a short introduction when they table a petition, and then the government has 45 days in which to respond. Many times, when members of the opposition get that government response, they may not find it to be very satisfactory. However, we could have a mechanism that would allow MPs, once they had received the government response, to launch some kind of a take-note debate, especially for petitions with signatures that exceeded a certain threshold and showed there was great interest right across the country. Maybe we could allocate spots based on indi-

vidual standings of the parties, but we could have a certain amount of time for people to bring forth for debate a petition that was of great national importance and explore why the issue needed to be part of the government's agenda. Such a measure could also give members of the opposition a lot more airtime to bring forth their constituents' concerns.

• (1820)

I also want to spend some time talking about how we can improve question period and debate in general. I often tell my constituents that question period is an hour of my life I will never get back each day. Trying to put forward a thoughtful question in 35 seconds and get a thoughtful response in 35 seconds, if we are honest with ourselves, is basically theatre.

I found it so refreshing over the summer when we, as a collective body, were sitting as part of the special committee on COVID-19. We had those five-minute spots where we could have that back-and-forth with a minister. One could have a bit of a longer introduction to one's question, ask the question, and then get the minister's response. Also, five minutes allows enough time to launch a rebuttal to the minister's response.

This would do two things: force ministers to go more in depth, because they could not just give the same canned answer, and force members of the opposition, if they actually did get an answer to their question, to change tack and really go with the flow of debate. I would love to see the Procedure and House Affairs Committee expand on that five minutes.

We also need to look at increasing the number of spots during the adjournment proceedings debate, which is a mechanism for MPs to follow up on a question that was asked during question period. Currently there are only three questions at a time, and they follow the format of a four-minute debate, a four-minute reply, a one-minute rebuttal and then a one-minute closing by the parliamentary secretary. This would be expanding that a bit more.

Those are two examples for the Procedure and House Affairs Committee to examine in our debate structure: first, reforming questions to allow for that five-minute exchange, and maybe looking at whether that four, four, one and one debate format can fit into other areas of the House.

Another aspect I would really like to see is regarding the Standing Orders. Our Standing Orders, as they are currently written, allow each year, during the main estimates, the Leader of the Opposition to select two particular ministries that the committee of the whole can question. I would like to see that mechanism expanded. I really enjoy the committee of the whole format, where a member has 15 minutes to use in any way they choose. They can make part of it their speech or have a back-and-forth question period, but it is 15 minutes. During the four hours scheduled, it really allows members to have in-depth back-and-forth.

Either we expand the number allowed during the main estimates, or we expand the number of times it happens each year. I really think that would do more justice. It would allow members of Parliament who are not members of the governing party to have more interactions to hold the government to account.

I have heard a lot of comments on how we make Parliament more family-friendly. I agree with some of my NDP colleagues who said no to eliminating a Friday sitting. I still believe that Friday sitting is important, and I am speaking as an MP who resides in a riding that is about as far away from Ottawa as one can get. For me, it is a nine-hour journey door to door.

We should be looking at making sure child care spaces are available to staff and MPs on the Hill, so parents see politics as a worthwhile enterprise. As well, in May and June, we have two five-week blocks separated by one constituency week. Why are we negotiating and scheduling five-week blocks of sittings? Could we not have a structure in place for our calendar where we have two-week blocks of sittings interspersed by one-week constituency weeks? That way MPs would not need to feel the pressure of travelling back to their ridings every weekend because they would be in Ottawa for a maximum of two weeks.

This is a great debate. I am really privileged to have been able to take part in it. I will conclude now, and I welcome any questions or comments my colleagues have.

• (1825)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Unfortunately, we have less than a minute for questions and comments.

If the member for Yukon could ask a question in 30 seconds or less, I would ask him to please do so, so the hon. member can answer.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member wanted to expand three types of debate: the take note on petitions, Private Members' Business and expanding the Adjournment Proceedings. There is already not enough time for government business.

What does the member think about the solution that Britain and Australia have of having a second chamber where we could have much more of all three of the items he wants?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, I am certainly willing to consider that. That conversation needs to take place when we move back into Centre Block. What are we going to do with the

Adjournment Proceedings

current chamber that is in West Block? Perhaps rather than converting it into committee rooms, we could see it stay as it is.

That is absolutely something we could consider.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 6:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 51(2), the matter is deemed to have been referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, before the Christmas break, I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs to explain why Veterans Affairs Canada was calling veterans across the country who were deemed eligible for and were already receiving the diminished earning capacity determination and telling them that they suddenly were no longer eligible.

In a specific case, the veteran was told that the office had lost the information that provided the proof of his eligibility and wanted the veteran to find the paperwork for the department. In my opinion, that is the problem of the government, not the veteran.

I hear from veterans across Canada about how frustrated they are when they experience having to reprove, again and again, serious health issues or concerns. We should do better for them.

In response to my question, the minister said that he appreciated my question and would look into the situation. He promised to address it promptly. I followed up with a letter, and the veterans and I are still waiting. Fairness should be at the very core of our supports for veterans after they served us so well.

We see the reality, though. The reality is that right now veterans are on a huge wait list for disability supports, tens of thousands of veterans. We still see veterans pointing out that the pension system is not fair in our country. With different streams, some veterans are eligible for certain access to programs while others are not. It is not based on the needs of veterans, but when they applied.

Adjournment Proceedings

Also, veterans have had significant timelines missed because the workers at Veterans Affairs Canada are burning out faster than they can be replaced. It is absolutely appalling that veterans who did the work on time but did not get the supports when they needed them are now left out of certain programs simply because timelines were missed because service providers were not there.

Most recently, we saw the veterans ombudsman's report on the serious concerns around restrictions on mental health supports for families. That is seriously shocking for me. We know that veterans need a stable family. If the supports are not there for that family, that family could break down, and that is not good for veterans.

Veterans have fought for our country. Just recently we saw them go into horrific situations in seniors' long-term care homes during COVID. I represent 19 Wing Comox. I am amazed by the service I see in our communities across Canada. For example, last year the serving members from 19 Wing went to Shamattawa First Nation to help out during the COVID outbreak.

I cannot say enough good things about our search and rescue folks. They help people in situations I cannot even imagine walking into.

When will Canada get it right and serve our men and women in uniform correctly? Why do we have service people, veterans who have served our country now being told they are no longer eligible even though they were receiving the benefit? It does not make sense. When will the Liberal government fix it?

• (1835)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Government of Canada takes very seriously any claim made by a veteran that they have been treated unjustly. We ask so much of our military members and we know that the traumas some have suffered have severely affected their ability to earn a living after they are released.

[Translation]

Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to ensuring the well-being of veterans and their families and does its best to ensure that the men and women who donned the uniform and helped shape our nation get adequate support in post-service life.

Veterans Affairs Canada uses the diminished earning capacity determination to ensure that eligible veterans, meaning those who, even after rehabilitation, are unable to return to the workforce and find sufficient gainful employment to support themselves and their family, receive financial assistance through the income replacement benefit. A group of very capable and highly qualified case managers and health care professionals participate in the decision-making process and ensure that veterans receive the highest level of support possible.

The top priority of Veterans Affairs Canada is to ensure that veterans get the support they need when they need it, and that includes financial support.

[English]

With that said, I can confirm that VAC staff was given no direction to contact veterans who have been determined to have diminished earning capacity or to abruptly adjust eligibility and remove benefits. If an individual veteran has concerns with the diminished earning capacity determination, they should absolutely reach out to the department so any questions can be properly addressed.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his response. When I hear that response, though, my concern is that what we are seeing is a process problem within the department where veterans are being told they are eligible, now they are not eligible, they might be eligible, or we cannot find the proper paperwork and can they send it in.

I also want to remind the member that the minister said directly to me that he would respond and let us know, but we are still waiting. We have been waiting for a response now for almost two months.

If the parliamentary secretary could take that back to the department, we need to make it right. Veterans serve us. It is important that we get it right for them and I am calling on the government to finally do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I will say again that no one at Veterans Affairs Canada was given direction to contact veterans about the determination of their diminished earning capacity.

[English]

This support mechanism testifies to the many risks that members of our military must face throughout the course of their military careers. We are extremely grateful to all of the veterans for the sacrifices they have made, particularly to those who have suffered debilitating injuries in the line of duty.

• (1840)

[Translation]

As always, the Government of Canada will do everything it can to ensure that these individuals and all other veterans get adequate support in post-service life.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[English]*

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, at the start of this pandemic almost a year ago, many Canadian workers suddenly lost their work. Millions found themselves without an income and with no way to pay for rent or food. The Liberal government suggested that we could fix that with tweaks to the employment insurance system. The NDP pointed out that most Canadian workers did not even qualify for EI because they are self-employed. They are artists, musicians, or contract workers, or workers in the gig economy. Most of them make modest incomes, but are proud that they can work and make enough to get by.

The NDP suggested that all these workers should receive \$2,000 per month to keep their lives together, so they could keep their homes and keep food on the table, and thankfully the government ended up agreeing with us and CERB was born. The Prime Minister said repeatedly that the government would always be there for these workers. When nine million workers applied for CERB, they had to attest that they had made more than \$5,000 in total income in the last 12 months. Now we hear that 400,000 of these workers who applied for CERB in good faith and met those criteria have received letters demanding that they repay thousands of dollars in CERB payments. They received those letters just before Christmas. Many of them simply do not have the money to repay, and they should not have to. They followed the rules.

The bill this House voted on to create CERB defined those eligible for support as “a person who...for 2019 or in the 12-month period preceding the day on which they make an application under section 5, has a total income of at least \$5,000”. The CRA website listed the eligible sources of income to include income from self-employment. That is the bill that I and other members of the House voted for. It clearly stated “total income”, not “net income” and not “taxable income”. Now the government has changed the rules to say that the \$5,000 should be net income.

One of my constituents, Carol, made just under \$10,000 in that previous year, but the CRA now says that she made just under \$5,000, a few dollars less than the limit, so she was one of the ones who got a letter asking her to repay her CERB supports. It was Carol I was talking about in my question for the Prime Minister, and it was his unhelpful answer that triggered this adjournment debate. Carol was so disappointed with the Prime Minister's reply that she wrote him a long, desperate letter outlining why she had applied for CERB, why she was qualified to receive it and why she cannot possibly pay the money back without losing everything, including her business.

Carol is not alone. I also heard from Jai, who also qualified under the total income provisions, but is now being asked to repay \$6,000. Jai is living with disabilities and a low income, and for her \$6,000 is an impossible sum to repay. We are hearing from thousands of Canadians, people with home-based aesthetics salons who closed their doors to protect public health and reopened when they were allowed to, but now face greatly reduced business. These business owners had small incomes to help them get by. Those incomes are largely gone because of COVID. They cannot repay these supports they thought the government was giving them to

make sure that they and their businesses survived. They are angry, disappointed and, frankly, they are scared.

When will the government admit that it made the mistake here, and not these hard-working Canadians?

- (1845)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay for his question. His constituents are well served by his advocacy.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been there for Canadian workers and continue to be there for them. Of all the programs and benefits, the CERB was the main support piece. We listened to Canadians. It helped nearly nine million workers and their families to avoid hardship.

When businesses were first shuttered last spring, our aim was to get income support into the hands of workers, including the self-employed, as quickly as possible. From the start, we used the same definition of self-employment income that we use for entitlement to every Government of Canada benefit, that is people look at their revenue and take off their expenses, which gives them their net pre-tax income. However, as the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion stated, we know that some people misunderstood the definition.

Before I go on, I would like to recognize the work of the call centre employees from CRA and Service Canada. They have done an outstanding job of supporting Canadians through this ongoing pandemic, and they deserve our praise.

We also know that in the initial weeks after the CERB was launched, some of the information provided was at times unclear. We are actively looking at options to respond to the concerns raised by some self-employed Canadians about the eligibility criteria and the information they received. We know very well that for some individuals, repaying the CERB could represent significant financial hardship. I again want to be very clear about the fact that no one is being asked to make a repayment at this time.

Adjournment Proceedings

First things first: What we need to do is confirm people's eligibility for the CERB. Of the nearly nine million people who got the CERB, we reached out to about 5% of applicants with our education letters. If an individual chooses to restart repaying amounts for which they were not eligible, flexible repayment options are available based on their individual financial situation. We know that for some this could be difficult. That is why there is going to be a compassionate case-by-case approach to repayment.

We are still in a pandemic crisis. That is the reality. During this difficult time, we will continue to stand by Canadian workers and their families.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, these hard-working Canadians are not asking for more time to pay back these benefits. They did nothing wrong. For them, the CERB payments did exactly what they were designed to do. They allowed them to keep living in dignity while working as much as they could under the circumstances.

On the other side of the coin, many large corporations received millions in wage subsidies to keep workers on the payroll. That is exactly what the wage subsidies were meant to do. What they were not meant to do was enrich shareholders with generous dividends. Unfortunately, at least 68 companies did just that. Imperial Oil, for instance, received \$120 million in government wage subsidies while paying out \$324 million in dividends. There is very clearly a double standard here.

The government is demanding that low-income workers who struggled through the pandemic repay the money they received even though they followed all the rules. It is not, however, asking the same of big corporations that used taxpayers' money to pay massive dividends to their shareholders.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, as the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion said, it is unfair to say that we are going after workers. The entire intention of the CERB was to protect people from potentially catastrophic income loss, and it worked.

I want to reassure Canadians who got a letter from the CRA that it does not mean they were ineligible for the CERB. It just means that the CRA needs more information from them. One way to provide the information the CRA needs is for Canadians to file their tax returns for both 2019 and 2020. It is too soon to talk about repayment. Repayment plans, if needed, will be worked out on a case-by-case basis.

I would like to thank the member once again for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the government has allowed this reduced version of democracy to continue in these difficult times. Many of my constituents believe that our work here is fundamental, even in these times, to ensuring that our democratic traditions of responsible government and accountability in this House are upheld.

As with so many matters, much water has passed under the bridge in these past months, particularly with respect to Canadian energy and pipeline infrastructure. Keystone XL was cancelled with

the stroke of a new U.S. president's pen, with barely a shrug of the shoulders from Canada's Prime Minister. "Disappointment" was the official response from the Prime Minister's Office. "Disappointment" represented the weakest response available from a multiple-choice list and barely registers in comparison to the shock and anger felt throughout Canada's resource industry.

Keystone XL was a piece of vital energy infrastructure that would have linked a world-class resource with a market that needs it and values it highly. Its sudden cancellation merits more than a shrug of the shoulders and a desire to just move on.

We know the government's focus by where it spends its time and its efforts. It is evidently not on world-leading net-zero infrastructure that would have reduced the environmental footprint of the final product by 20%, so the government's focus is not on real environmental outcomes. It is not on going to bat for infrastructure in which five first nations held an equity stake, so it is not on indigenous reconciliation. It is not for the thousands of workers dismissed from their jobs, so it is not on workers. It is not on the economic benefits built into this world-class Canadian project, which was projected to be assessed for \$30 billion in taxes that would be paid to government over its life; so it is not for Canadian services and benefits, a social safety net and health care, or all the government services that we enjoy. This is a government unconcerned about the ability to provide care for Canadians in the next several years.

Let us call it what it is. It is an absolute failure on energy in every area that matters to Canadians: environmental advancement, fail; indigenous reconciliation, fail; Canadian jobs, fail; economic benefits, fail; continued ability to deliver government services, fail.

I hear the protests of the Minister of Natural Resources about how hard he tried. I have to remind him here that this trying and failing is becoming repetitive with his cabinet colleagues. His cheerleading is falling on deaf ears with his leadership, who are all saying once again, just as on Teck Frontier's withdrawal, "Let's move on."

Regarding Enbridge Line 5, I have heard the minister, the Prime Minister and their proxies neglect to respond to the real issue facing the potential closure of Line 5. Supplying 540,000 barrels of oil per day to refineries in Ontario and Quebec, this has been an essential part of our national infrastructure since 1953. It is a link between Canada and the United States that has provided much to our shared prosperity, and its importance was recognized by the signing of the transit pipelines treaty in 1977, supported at that time by Senator Joe Biden.

There is a deadline to respond to this threat of closure from the governor of Michigan—

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1850)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Calgary Centre for allowing me to speak to this important issue.

I will begin by reminding the House that our government has always supported Canada's energy industry and that it will continue to support the industry, its workers and the communities that benefit from it. We are doing that while making health, safety and environmental protection the top priority in every aspect of the energy industry, and while respecting indigenous rights and promoting reconciliation.

Every Canadian can be proud of that, especially with the current challenges, including a global drop in the price of oil and the economic repercussions of a once-in-a-century pandemic.

In that context, the government has taken measures to support the industry in several ways.

In the spring, as part of a suite of business support measures, the government launched the business credit availability program. This initiative meets the immediate cash flow needs of businesses in Alberta and across Canada. We also brought in the Canada emergency wage subsidy to help employers affected by COVID-19 rehire their employees and to prevent further job losses.

The government has also provided nearly \$2.8 billion to support Canada's energy industry. This includes \$750 million for the new emissions reduction fund, as well as a \$1.7-billion investment for the remediation of inactive and abandoned wells.

In addition, our government has announced \$320 million in federal support for Newfoundland and Labrador offshore industry and workers.

[*English*]

Taken together, our government has brought forward a comprehensive set of supports. All of this in addition to our government's proven track record of approval of and support for major oil and gas projects, including TMX, LNG Canada, the Nova Gas expansion and Line 3 extension, which we know will create thousands of jobs and drive billions in investments, and complement our initiatives to reach our Paris climate commitments.

We also vigorously supported the KXL project at the highest levels. Like our government of Alberta partners, with whom we worked closely, we were disappointed in the President's decision. We have been clear that we will help the affected Canadian workers. However, we must also focus on our relationship with Canada's number one energy customer in areas of mutual Canada-U.S. inter-

est, such as firm climate action, enhanced North American energy security and co-operation to rebuild our economies.

Canada's energy sector will be a big part of the North American recovery. It is a source of good, well-paying jobs in Canada, and our government will continue to stand with the sector and the thousands of hard-working Canadians it employs.

• (1855)

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, I have heard, in several responses, about how much the government has done for the energy industry over the pandemic period and the price we received from our other oil suppliers around the world. Nevertheless, going forward we keep failing on all of these energy files. We have talked about Keystone XL. We have talked about the Teck Frontier project. We are now talking about Enbridge Line 5. We are failing to deliver success on every one of these files. Looking back and saying that we will take care of the workers, who are bleeding off through this industry because of inaction from the government, is not a response. We need to build this country going forward, including with world-leading infrastructure.

However, with Line 5, we also have to make sure world-leading infrastructure is not destroyed in the process. Undoing that piece of infrastructure, as the governor of Michigan is proposing to do at this point in time, will end what has been a 60-year benefit to both our nations as far as providing prosperity goes. The government needs to elevate the urgency of this file now.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, as I said, our government's record is clear and self-evident. We are approving major projects and providing support to the oil and gas sector when and where it is needed.

[*Translation*]

We have been and will continue to be there to support the energy industry during the worst times of this pandemic.

[*English*]

Every step of the way, we will always do the hard work necessary to ensure that good and sustainable projects go forward with the full confidence of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Our government remains confident that we can move forward simultaneously on economic prosperity and our climate commitments, as Canada fights for a low-carbon future.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:57 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, February 1, 2021

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Income Tax Act

Bill C-208. Second reading	3797
Mr. Ste-Marie	3797
Mr. Johns	3798
Mr. Généreux	3800
Mr. Gerretsen	3801
Mr. Barsalou-Duval	3803
Mr. Maguire	3804
Division on motion deferred	3805

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Standing Orders and Procedure

Motion	3805
Mr. Lamoureux	3805
Mr. Kmiec	3806
Mr. Beaulieu	3807
Mr. Julian	3807
Mr. Kmiec	3807
Mr. Longfield	3809
Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	3809
Mr. Gerretsen	3810
Ms. Normandin	3810
Ms. Gazan	3811
Mr. Beaulieu	3812
Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	3812
Mr. Julian	3812
Mr. Genuis	3814
Mr. Gerretsen	3814
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	3814
Mrs. Romanado	3814
Mr. Trudel	3816
Mr. Kmiec	3816
Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	3816
Mr. Kelly	3816
Mr. Erskine-Smith	3818
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	3818
Ms. Gazan	3818
Mr. Bagnell	3818
Mr. Genuis	3820
Mrs. Vignola	3820
Mr. Longfield	3820
Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	3820
Mr. Genuis	3821

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

World Interfaith Harmony Week

Ms. Ratansi	3822
-------------------	------

Mental Health

Ms. Khalid	3822
------------------	------

Bullying

Mr. Vis	3822
---------------	------

Poland

Mr. Arya	3823
----------------	------

François Dupéré

Mr. Boudrias	3823
--------------------	------

COVID-19 Emergency Response

Mr. Arseneault	3823
----------------------	------

GameStop

Mr. Genuis	3823
------------------	------

COVID-19 Emergency Response

Mr. Lamoureux	3824
---------------------	------

Surrey Anti-gang Family Empowerment

Mr. Sarai	3824
-----------------	------

Photographers in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier

Mr. Godin	3824
-----------------	------

Orléans

Mrs. Lalonde	3824
--------------------	------

Black History Month

Mr. Rayes	3824
-----------------	------

Indigenous Affairs

Mr. Melillo	3825
-------------------	------

Hamilton Black History Council

Mr. Green	3825
-----------------	------

National Suicide Prevention Week

Mrs. DeBellefeuille	3825
---------------------------	------

Health

Mrs. Jansen	3825
-------------------	------

Black History Month

Ms. Ien	3826
---------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Natural Resources

Ms. Bergen	3826
------------------	------

Mr. O'Regan	3826
-------------------	------

Ms. Bergen	3826
------------------	------

Mr. O'Regan	3826
-------------------	------

Employment

Ms. Bergen	3826
------------------	------

Mr. O'Regan	3826
-------------------	------

Health	
Mr. Martel	3827
Ms. Anand	3827
Mr. Martel	3827
Ms. Anand	3827
Mr. Therrien	3827
Ms. Anand	3827
Mr. Therrien	3827
Ms. Anand	3827
Mr. Singh	3827
Mr. Alghabra	3828
Mr. Singh	3828
Mr. Alghabra	3828
Ms. Rempel Garner	3828
Mr. Alghabra	3828
Ms. Rempel Garner	3828
Ms. Hajdu	3828
Mr. Paul-Hus	3828
Ms. Bodayan	3829
Mr. Paul-Hus	3829
Ms. Bodayan	3829
Mrs. Gray	3829
Ms. Bodayan	3829
Mrs. Gray	3829
Ms. Bodayan	3829
Ms. Michaud	3829
Mr. Rodriguez	3829
Mr. Barsalou-Duval	3829
Mr. Rodriguez	3830
Mr. Barsalou-Duval	3830
Mr. Rodriguez	3830
COVID-19 Emergency Response	
Mr. Kent	3830
Ms. Qualtrough	3830
Mr. Kent	3830
Ms. Freeland	3830
Mr. Berthold	3831
Ms. Qualtrough	3831
Health	
Mr. Bachrach	3831
Mr. Alghabra	3831
The Environment	
Mr. Van Bynen	3831
Mr. O'Regan	3831
COVID-19 Emergency Response	
Mr. MacGregor	3831
Ms. Bodayan	3831
Government Appointments	
Mr. Barlow	3832
Mr. Garneau	3832
Mr. Barlow	3832
Mr. Garneau	3832
The Economy	
Mr. Poilievre	3832

Ms. Freeland	3832
Mr. Poilievre	3832
Ms. Freeland	3832
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe	3833
Mr. Mendicino	3833
Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe	3833
Mr. Mendicino	3833
Natural Resources	
Ms. Gladu	3833
Mr. O'Regan	3833
Mr. Richards	3833
Mr. O'Regan	3834
Mr. Falk (Provencher)	3834
Mr. O'Regan	3834
Diversity and Inclusion	
Mr. Dubourg	3834
Ms. Chagger	3834
Infrastructure	
Mr. Bezan	3834
Mr. Wilkinson	3834
Government Contracts	
Mr. McCauley	3834
Ms. Anand	3834
Telecommunications	
Ms. Rood	3835
Ms. Monsef	3835
Air Transportation	
Mr. Kelloway	3835
Mr. Alghabra	3835
Public Safety	
Ms. Gazan	3835
Mr. Blair	3835
Telecommunications	
Mr. Tabbara	3835
Mr. Champagne	3835
GOVERNMENT ORDERS	
Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement Implementation Act	
Bill C-18. Second reading	3836
Motion agreed to	3837
(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee) ..	3837
Points of Order	
Voting Process	
Mr. Therrien	3837

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Procedure and House Affairs

Ms. Sahota (Brampton North) 3837

Equalization and Transfers Fairness Act

Mr. Kmiec 3837

Bill C-263. Introduction and first reading 3837

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 3837

Committees of the House

Procedure and House Affairs

Ms. Sahota (Brampton North) 3837

Motion for concurrence 3837

(Motion agreed to) 3838

Business of the House

Mr. Gerretsen 3838

Motion 3838

(Motion agreed to) 3838

Petitions

Human Rights

Mrs. Block 3838

Mr. Maguire 3838

Mr. Genuis 3838

Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) 3838

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lamoureux 3838

Request for Emergency Debate

COVID-19 Variants

Mr. Manly 3838

Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker 3839

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Standing Orders and Procedure

Motion 3839

Mr. Genuis 3839

Mr. Lamoureux 3839

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 3840

Mr. Simms 3840

Mr. Kmiec 3842

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 3842

Ms. Gladu 3842

Mr. Godin 3842

Mr. Champoux 3844

Mr. Gerretsen 3844

Mr. Cannings 3844

Mrs. Lalonde 3845

Mr. Lake 3846

Mr. Garrison 3846

Mr. Manly 3846

Mr. Therrien 3847

Mr. Lamoureux 3848

Mr. Kmiec 3848

Mr. Cannings 3848

Mr. Gerretsen 3849

Mr. Lake 3850

Mr. Cannings 3850

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 3850

Ms. Gladu 3850

Mr. Bagnell 3852

Mr. Kmiec 3852

Mr. Blaikie 3853

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 3853

Mr. Simms 3854

Mr. Genuis 3855

Mr. Simard 3855

Mr. Blaikie 3855

Ms. Zann 3857

Mr. Lake 3857

Mr. Champoux 3857

Mr. MacGregor 3857

Mr. Bagnell 3859

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Veterans Affairs

Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River) 3859

Mr. Samson 3860

Employment

Mr. Cannings 3861

Mr. Kusmierczyk 3861

Natural Resources

Mr. McLean 3862

Mr. Lefebvre 3863

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